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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	08/25 More can't afford to pay electric bill
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2022-08-25/more-americans-than-ever-can-t-afford-to-pay-their-electric-bill
GIST	A "Tsunami of Shut-Offs" Is Coming

US electricity prices surging and more people than ever are struggling to pay the power company. [More than 20 million American households have fallen behind on their utility bills](#), about 1 of every 6 homes, and the amount they owe has doubled since before the pandemic.

With more people owing more money, utilities are getting more aggressive about cutting off delinquent customers. Many states imposed shutoff moratoriums during the pandemic, but those policies wound down just as record inflation made power – and almost everything else — more costly.

That’s going to trigger a “tsunami of shutoffs,” Jean Su, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, told Bloomberg News for a story I co-wrote this week on the coming crisis.

The basic problem is that [electricity is more expensive](#), up 15% from a year ago, and there's no sign of relief. That’s because power prices are linked to the cost of natural gas, which has more than doubled in the past year and is expected to remain high at least into next year.

Meanwhile, climate change has triggered [extreme heat around the world](#), driving up power consumption, and power bills, as people seek refuge in air-conditioning. And in many hot regions, cooling isn't just for comfort — [people who lose power during a stifling heat wave can die](#). While 41 states have some kind of protection against winter shutoffs for exactly this reason, only 19 have similar policies for the sweltering summer months. New Orleans last month asked its local utility to halt summer shutoffs as temperatures climbed, and this is going to become more urgent amid the global climate crisis.

Government aid is helping avert some shutoffs, and Congress this month asked for additional emergency funding on top of the \$4 billion already set aside for a federal assistance program this year. Many states also have assistance programs, and utilities are generally willing to work with struggling customers. Most will agree not to shut off power to people who have applied for assistance or signed up for some kind of payment plan.

But that help is just a band-aid that masks the underlying issue, according to Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association. Low-income families already face a high energy burden, with a greater portion of their income needed to cover utility bills than wealthier families. For some, electricity is becoming too expensive to afford at all.

“The bills just aren’t affordable,” says Wolfe. “People on the bottom, they can’t pay this.”

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HEADLINE	08/25 Ukraine officials warn: long, bloody slog
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/25/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#ukraine-is-hitting-russian-forces-hard-but-has-a-long-way-to-go-a-top-official-cautions
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Even as the Ukrainian government sought to bolster the nation’s resolve with defiant commemorations of its Independence Day, military leaders tried to brace the public for a long, bloody slog ahead as Russia appeared to be aiming to strengthen its grip on Ukrainian territory it has seized.</p> <p>“It’s going to be very difficult; it’s not going to be easy,” the head of Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, Oleksiy Danilov, said in an interview aired Wednesday with Radio Liberty, a U.S.-funded independent news organization. “And if someone thinks that we have already passed some kind of Rubicon and that the rest will be like clockwork, unfortunately, it will not be.”</p> <p>The Russian Ministry of Defense has said it was slowing the pace of its military campaign — a reflection, Western military analysts say, of the Kremlin’s need to explain the lack of military progress at home after going weeks without gaining significant new ground in Ukraine.</p> <p>But Moscow continues to rain rocket strikes on the country, including on Wednesday, when two dozen people were killed in an attack on a train station in the east. And the United States warned that Moscow</p>

may try to stage “sham” referendums, possibly as soon as this weekend, in order to provide a veil of legitimacy as it moves to annex parts of the country under its control.

“We expect Russia to try to manipulate the results of these referenda under the false claim of the Ukrainian people wanting to join Russia,” John F. Kirby, the National Security Council spokesman, told reporters on Wednesday. “It will be critical to call out and counter this disinformation in real time.”

He did not offer more detail on why the United States thinks referendums could move so quickly, or what effect such a move could have on efforts to negotiate an end to the fighting. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has previously said he would end talks with Russia if Moscow holds referendums in occupied areas.

The Ukrainian government has been urging people living under occupation to resist pressure to participate in the referendums. Its network of partisan fighters have stepped up their attacks on local Russian proxy administrations.

The Ukrainian military’s southern command said on Thursday that “local resistance prevents the Russians from taking organizational measures to prepare a fake demonstration of will.”

The concern about Moscow’s referendum planning underscores the steep challenges Ukraine faces as it seeks to translate losses it has recently inflicted against Russian forces into successfully regaining territory. Moscow is now estimated to control some 20 percent of Ukraine.

Strikes against ammunition depots and command centers — along with the work of partisans targeting Russian occupation forces behind enemy lines — are part of a counteroffensive as the Ukrainians seeks to both degrade Russian forces and sow chaos.

But as Mr. Zelensky and other leaders have vowed that Ukraine will win the war, they have also repeatedly urged Ukrainians living under Russian occupation to be patient.

Ukrainian forces have yet to make any major push to drive the Russians from occupied territory, and officials have said they understand they have a limited amount of time to take advantage of Russia’s apparent struggles. And Ukraine, too, has lost fighters and equipment, as its civilians have suffered through frequent Russian strikes.

By 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Ukraine’s air defense alarm systems were triggered 189 times in 24 hours, the most in a day since the start of the invasion, according to government data. The previous high was 109, on April 23.

Mr. Danilov said the hardest days may yet lie ahead.

“We will have a big war with this country,” he said, “and we will have to put a lot of effort in order to win.”

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HEADLINE	08/25 Russia: attack on Ukraine railway station
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-struck-railway-station-ukraines-chaplyne-2022-08-25/
GIST	<p>Aug 25 (Reuters) - Russia's defence ministry said on Thursday its forces had hit a military train at Chaplyne railway station in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region.</p> <p>Kyiv says 25 civilians died in the Russian strike on Wednesday, which it says was aimed at residential areas.</p> <p>Russia denies targeting civilians in what it calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine.</p>

	Reuters was unable to verify battlefield reports.
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HEADLINE	08/25 Putin decree: increase size Russia military
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-signs-decree-increase-size-russian-armed-forces-2022-08-25/
GIST	<p>Aug 25 (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on Thursday to increase the size of Russia's armed forces from 1.9 to 2.04 million, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.</p> <p>The figure, which includes a 137,000 increase in the number of military personnel to 1.15 million, comes into effect on Jan 1.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Record rain drought-stricken areas
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/08/25/weather-climate-drought-flooding-dallas-whiplash/
GIST	<p>On Monday morning, the Dallas-Fort Worth area awoke to disaster. Rain was pouring down at the rate of 2 to 3 inches per hour. Highways became lethal lagoons, brooks became basins, and thousands of people scrambled to higher ground.</p> <p>Just a day earlier, the city had been facing one of its worst droughts on record, with farmers forced to thin their herds as reservoirs rapidly shrank. Twenty-nine percent of the Lone Star State was encapsulated within a top-tier level 4 out of 4 “exceptional” drought. Very dry conditions took a heavy toll on crops and forced widespread water restrictions.</p> <p>The extreme case of atmospheric caprice highlighted a growing issue plaguing communities across the United States and the world: weather whiplash.</p> <p>This summer, several locations around the United States have experienced these wild, rapid swings from one weather extreme to another. About half of the country has undergone at least a moderate drought this summer. Parts of the West, the Midwest and Texas have experienced exceptional and historic drought conditions.</p> <p>Then the storms came. On July 26 in St. Louis, a shocking 8.65 inches of rain fell to mark the city’s wettest day on record. The next day, in eastern Kentucky, rainfall rates topped 2 inches per hour and took the lives of 38 people. In August, eastern Illinois, Death Valley and Dallas also experienced significant or record-breaking rainfall. On Wednesday, flash flooding across central Mississippi swept away roads and prompted rescues.</p> <p>“It is unusual, especially on the extreme precipitation [and] flash flood side,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles. “They’re not just beating a historical record by a marginal amount, but just completely blowing right past it and then some.”</p> <p>Yet he isn’t surprised: A warmer climate is driving precipitation to higher extremes in both flooding and drought.</p> <p>“The increase in both extreme precipitation events and in these wild swings between extreme precipitation and extreme aridity — this is how most people and most ecosystems on Earth are experiencing climate change,” Swain said.</p> <p>Two sides of the same coin How can both drought and high-rain events result from climate change? Simple.</p>

Warmer air can hold more water. In fact, for every degree Fahrenheit the atmosphere warms, the air can hold about 4 percent more water. Where there is moisture available, such as along the Gulf or East coasts, more moisture can be transported and dropped, leading to flooding and high-end precipitation totals.

But where moisture is scarce, such as in the West, warmer air sucks humidity out of the ground. This desiccated landscape reinforces extreme heat, leading to drought and extreme wildfire behavior.

The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlighted this issue in a recent assessment report, [writing](#) that “aridification” and “extreme precipitation events that lead to severe flooding” are both byproducts of the warming climate.

There has also been a tendency for weather patterns to become “stuck,” stalling for longer. That may be why Dallas faced drought for months and was 11 inches behind for the year before this week’s flooding. Now, such precipitation extremes are more feast or famine.

It may have to do with a wavier jet stream, which is believed to be shifting weather features west to east (in the Northern Hemisphere) more slowly. That allows for systems to stall. If a heat dome becomes entrenched in place, weeks of sunshine and dry weather can prevail. In all instances of thousand-year rain events this summer, a stalled frontal boundary was responsible for the deluges.

Make no mistake — when it comes to weather, getting a perfectly average day is atypical. Averages are just found by smoothing over the dips and crests in a random chaotic system. But when heat energy and entropy, or a bit of extra chaos, is added to that system, the dips and crests become much more extreme.

Flash flooding won’t cure a drought

Record flooding should fix a record drought, right? Not quite.

Water during a drought can help, but how fast and how much water falls matters.

During a drought, the ground dries and becomes less permeable. Top soils harden, which make it easier for water to run off. Drought also kills plants and leaves the ground bare, which further limits how much water the soil can absorb. When it rains, much of the water immediately runs off and doesn’t replenish the soils, aquifers or river flow beyond the initial burst.

“You get more instantaneous runoff, higher flashy flood flows on rivers and streams, but less of that water is soaking into the ground,” Swain said. “So you’re getting less soil moisture from the same amount of water.”

In fact, drought can actually lead to a greater risk of flooding. The dry ground hit with the rapid rainfall can promote runoff and trigger widespread flooding.

For instance, in Dallas, while the rainfall was desperately needed, most of what fell didn’t benefit the greater metro area. The event caused deadly flash flooding, but also almost all of the water that came down washed into a watershed that flows into Lake Livingston and eventually toward Houston. The National Weather Service in Fort Worth summed it up by writing “heavy rain, but wrong watershed.”

And last week, about 200 people were [trapped for several hours in New Mexico’s Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#) amid heavy flooding.

Swain said weather whiplash also means there are more dry days between the few rainy days — providing more opportunities for the water to evaporate back into the atmosphere. Even the water that does stick around may evaporate quickly, especially in a warming world.

“The soil moisture and the vegetation is still going to be responding in the long run as if there’s a severe drought, because in the long run, there still is,” Swain said.

HEADLINE	08/25 India: ‘tomato flu’ outbreak among children
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/25/tomato-flu-outbreak-symptoms-india/
GIST	<p>A new, highly contagious viral infection that has been dubbed “tomato flu” is spreading among children in India, the country’s Health Ministry said this week.</p> <p>At least 82 children under age 5 had been infected by late July in the southern state of Kerala, after the first patient was identified there in May. Infections have now been recorded in three other states — including 26 children between the ages of 1 and 9 in Odisha — the Times of India reported Thursday.</p> <p>The infection gets its name from the “eruption of red and painful blisters throughout the body that gradually enlarge to the size of a tomato,” according to an article published last week in the British medical journal Lancet. The blisters resemble those seen on young monkeypox patients.</p> <p>The disease — which appears to spread through close contact and is not considered life-threatening — could be an aftereffect of chikungunya or dengue rather than a viral infection, according to the article.</p> <p>Tomato flu could also be a new variant of hand, foot and mouth disease, which is common among children under age 5, the Lancet article said. It added that the new infection is a self-limiting illness — one that tends to resolve spontaneously without treatment — for which no specific drug is available.</p> <p>Young children appear to be at increased risk because of the use of diapers, their tendency to touch unclean surfaces and their propensity to put things into their mouths.</p> <p>“Given the similarities to hand, foot, and mouth disease, if the outbreak of tomato flu in children is not controlled and prevented, transmission might lead to serious consequences by spreading in adults as well,” the authors of the Lancet article wrote.</p> <p>Its primary symptoms include high fever, rashes and intense joint pain — similar to those of chikungunya. Other symptoms include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and common influenza-like symptoms, akin to a dengue infection.</p> <p>Although tomato flu and covid-19 have similar symptoms, the virus that causes the new disease is not related to the coronavirus, the Lancet article said. Tomato flu is diagnosed after tests have ruled out dengue, chikungunya, Zika, chickenpox and herpes.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Setback: polio reemerges in US, UK
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/polio-is-back-in-the-us-and-uk-heres-how-that-happened/
GIST	<p>THE DISCOVERY THAT polio has partially paralyzed a young man in a New York suburb feels wearying, yet shocking. Wearying, because it’s the third highly infectious virus to make a surprise landfall in the US in three years, after monkeypox and SARS-CoV-2. And shocking because, for decades, polio hasn’t spread in rich nations, where sanitation, vaccination, and solid public health funding are presumed to keep populations safe. Transmission was eliminated in the US in 1979, all of the Americas in 1994, and the UK in 2003. And yet there it was, in the wastewater of the county where the young man lives and a neighboring one, in New York City, and also in London.</p> <p>Of course, polio exists in other parts of the world. A global campaign to eradicate it has been laboring on that exhausting task since 1988. Last year, poliovirus caused paralysis—which can’t be treated or cured—in two countries where it has never been contained, and another 21 where it has rebounded.</p> <p>Disease experts, though, were not surprised to see it reappear in Western nations. For years they’ve watched as protection against the disease was undermined by funding cuts, vaccine hesitancy, forgetfulness—and the wily nature of the virus. “This should be a wake-up call to people,” says Heidi</p>

Larson, a professor and founder of the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “We have been saying that until we can get this fully eradicated, we are all at risk.”

Public health experts consider this an emergency, because polio paralysis cases represent the tip of an immunological iceberg: For every person paralyzed, at least several hundred more have likely carried asymptomatic infections, providing a refuge for the virus to replicate and transmit itself. That takes time. Wastewater findings show that polio has been circulating possibly [since February](#) in London, and for at least [several months](#) in New York.

This feeling of urgency is why London health authorities have [offered booster doses](#) of vaccine to any kids 9 years or younger, and why their counterparts in New York City—where [40 percent of kids](#) in some zip codes are not vaccinated—have [urged parents](#) to bring children in for shots. “The number one way to prevent paralytic polio is to get vaccinated against the poliovirus, and the vaccine is over 99 percent effective at preventing paralysis,” says Daniel Pastula, a physician and associate professor at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus who studies neuro-invasive diseases. “If you are unvaccinated, or your children are unvaccinated against polio, and poliovirus is circulating in your community, you are at risk for developing paralytic polio.”

To understand how polio ended up in these cities, it helps to review a little history. Two histories, in fact: one for the polio vaccine, and one for how it’s been deployed to chase the disease from the world.

Start with the vaccine formula—or formulas, actually, because there are two. They were born from a ferocious mid-20th century rivalry between scientists Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. Salk’s formula, the first to be approved, is injected; it uses an inactivated version of the virus, and protects against developing disease, but does not stop viral transmission. Sabin’s formula, which came a few years later, used an artificially-weakened live virus. It does block transmission, and—because it is a liquid that gets squirted into a child’s mouth—it is cheaper to make and easier to distribute, since it doesn’t require trained healthcare workers or careful disposal of needles. Those qualities made the Sabin oral version, known as OPV, the bulwark of polio control, and eventually the main weapon in the global eradication campaign.

The oral vaccine had a unique benefit. Wild-type polio is actually a gut virus: It locks onto receptors in the intestinal lining and replicates there before migrating to the nerve cells that control muscles. But because it’s in the gut, it also passes out of the body in feces and then spreads to other people in contaminated water. The Sabin vaccine takes advantage of that process: The vaccine virus replicates in a child, gets pooped out, and spreads its protection to unvaccinated neighbors.

Yet that benefit concealed a tragic flaw. Once out of every several million doses, the weakened virus reverted to the neurovirulence of the wild type, destroying those motor neurons and causing polio paralysis. That mutation would also make a child who harbored the reverted virus a potential source of infection, rather than protection. That risk is what caused rich nations to abandon the oral version: In 1996, when wild polio was no longer occurring in the US, the oral vaccine caused [about 10 cases](#) of polio paralysis in children. The US switched to the injectable formula, known as IPV, in 2000, and the UK followed in 2004.

Polio vaccination requires several doses to create full protection, and once that occurs, children are protected against both wild-type and vaccine-derived versions of the virus. So the international vaccination campaign continued to rely on OPV, arguing that the risk would diminish as more children received protection. That was a reasonable gamble when the effort was new and health authorities thought it would take 10 to 12 years to achieve eradication. But thanks to funding shortfalls, [political and religious unrest](#), and the [Covid pandemic](#)—which imposed a slowdown not just on eradication activities but on [all childhood vaccines](#)—it’s now been 34 years, and the job is not done. Meanwhile, [last year in](#) 20 countries there were a total of 688 cases of paralysis of what’s called “circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus,” and only six cases of wild-type polio, in three nations.

There’s a further complexity driving the emergence of vaccine-derived virus, and that arises from a combination of its natural history and the vaccination roll-out. Poliovirus comes in three strains: types 1, 2,

and 3. Originally, both vaccines contained all three. As time went on and more people gained immunity, the strains began to occur less frequently, but not at the same rate. The first to disappear was type 2, so in 2016 planners decided to take that strain out of OPV. (Because type 2 attaches to the gut more efficiently than the others, its inclusion interfered with establishing immunity to the other types, and it no longer made sense to let a strain that wasn't circulating dominate the immune response.) In one [enormous coordinated action](#), known as “the switch,” the eradication campaign swapped the three-strain vaccine for a bivalent one.

But removing type 2 from the formula meant that if any type 2 virus reemerged in the world—from an environmental reservoir, or from someone whose system harbored a mutated vaccine virus—there would be little defense against it. And the bet on the switch did not pay off.

“I think the best way to describe this is as an honest mistake,” says Svea Closser, a medical anthropologist and associate professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies polio eradication. “They did not expect the extent and spread, and global reach, of these type 2 outbreaks.”

Most of the vaccine-derived virus now circulating is mutated type 2. It primarily has appeared in Central Africa, where outbreaks have spread across national borders. The polioviruses found in New York and London are mutated type 2, as well. Importantly, though these two viruses are related to each other—and to vaccine-derived viruses found earlier in Israel—there is not yet any genomic evidence that they are related to African viruses. They have fewer genetic changes from the vaccine virus than the African-circulating ones do, indicating that they emerged more recently. They likely were imported from somewhere that once used OPV (as Israel did [in the 2000s](#)) or continues to.

That’s significant, and not just because these type 2 viruses may have emerged from the misplaced optimism of the switch. The generally accepted data about the incidence of polio—about one case of paralysis for every 200 infections—comes from research into type 1. Some data suggests that the numbers for type 2 are different: one case of paralysis for every 2,000 infected. Thus, if one New Yorker is paralyzed, thousands might be passing on the virus unknowingly. Add in neighborhood clusters of low vaccination rates, and the area could be more vulnerable than people understand.

“This always comes back to immunization coverage,” says John Vertefeuille, an epidemiologist and the branch chief for polio eradication at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “This area in New York, the vaccine coverage is not as high as it is in much of the US population, and the early detections in London were in places that had lower vaccine coverage than you would typically see.”

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HEADLINE	08/24 Ethnic minority groups fight back Putin
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/93a33z/ethnic-minority-russia-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>Ethnic minority groups in Russia are increasingly rising up in defiance against Vladimir Putin after being blamed for committing some of the worst atrocities of the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>When the strategic Ukrainian city of Mariupol finally fell to Russian forces, it was images of Chechen soldiers cheering and chanting in front of bombed-out, burning buildings that went around the world. Shocking footage that emerged last month showed a Russian soldier – reportedly from a Chechen unit – castrating a Ukrainian prisoner.</p> <p>The massacre of civilians at Bucha, perhaps the most horrific single atrocity of the war to date, was at first linked to fighters from Buryatia, which borders Mongolia in Russia’s Far East.</p> <p>Media coverage has typecast Chechens as savage and Buryats as bloodthirsty and both as fiercely loyal to Putin, in spite of long-term repression of their people by the Kremlin.</p> <p>Now, ethnic minority anti-war activists from Buryatia and Chechnya tell VICE World News that the violence allegedly committed by soldiers from their regions has either been over-played in reporting or</p>

entirely fictionalised. In response, they are forming some of Russia's most vocal anti-war campaign groups.

The media focus on ethnic minority soldiers is a double win for Putin, and is partly fuelled by Kremlin-linked social media channels. Not only does it divert attention from atrocities carried out by ethnic Russian fighters, it also presents the many peoples that make up the population of the Russian Federation as united behind their president.

There are no official figures available for the ethnic breakdown of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, but [analysis of the names of confirmed deaths](#) suggest 70 per cent of casualties are ethnic Russians, or Slavs, who make up around 80 percent of Russia's population.

Ethnic minority activists are striving to correct what they say is distorted coverage of the war in Western, Ukrainian and Kremlin-linked media. They are helping soldiers fighting for the Russian army in Ukraine to terminate their contracts and return home.

And they are using the conflict to push for a historic reckoning with Russian racism and imperialism within its own borders.

"We want to convince Buryats not to fight," says Alexandra Garmazhapova, the co-founder of the [Free Buryatia Foundation](#), which was set up in the weeks following the invasion of Ukraine. "This is a Russian imperial war, and we are the victims of Russian imperialism. We have to be on the side of the Ukrainians."

As surveys consistently show that three-quarters of Russians now support the invasion, Garmazhapova claims that it is ethnic minorities who are leading the fight against the Kremlin's aggression. "We are doing more to speak out, because we understand Ukrainians and they understand us."

Buryatia – a region of around one million people, a third of whom are ethnic Buryat – has historic ties to Mongolia, but was incorporated into Tsarist Russia during a period of imperial expansion from the 1600s onwards.

It is one of 22 republics in today's Russian Federation, which were originally divided along ethnic lines. Others include the Muslim-majority Caucasus regions of Chechnya and Dagestan, and the far northern Yakutia.

Buryatia, a traditionally Buddhist and Shaminist steppe region, is also one of the poorest parts of the country. The average monthly salary there is 44,000 rubles (about \$740), around a third of the equivalent in Moscow. Signing up to the army after completing mandatory military service is one of the most attractive options available for many young Buryat men.

But the Free Buryatia Foundation has helped more than 150 soldiers, some of whom were on short-term contracts, to resign their positions [after seeing the reality of the war in Ukraine](#). Garmazhapova says a total of 500 personnel have requested support from their legal team, and more are getting in touch every day.

"Early in the conflict it was relatively easy to leave," she says. "There was a sense among the commanders that 'we can always get more'." Six months into the war, the process is harder, with soldiers being put in detention or threatened with prosecution if they leave their posts.

At the same time, the foundation is working to debunk reports of Buryat involvement in the worst of the violence. An investigation claimed that less than two percent of the Russians stationed in Bucha had Buryat names, while one Buryat soldier who was reported as a perpetrator of the massacre had in fact left the army three years earlier.

"We express our deepest sympathies with the victims [of the Bucha massacre] and their loved ones...criminals should be punished to the full extent of the law," [the foundation wrote in its report](#).

But it added that Buryat involvement was one of the “main myths” of the war, which has proved all but impossible to correct after the initial story has gone out. These myths also tap into a deeper, older prejudice about violent “Mongol” Buryatia in Russian culture that dates back to the Golden Horde and its invasions from the 13th century.

Garmazhapova, a 33-year-old who is now based in Prague, says the “negative PR” around Buryats and other ethnic groups is at least drawing attention towards the racism that prompted her to emigrate from Russia in 2016. All of the several dozen activists working for the foundation are based outside the country, and its website is blocked in Russia.

Garmazhapova says: “To be equal, you have to be twice as good. You have to be better dressed so as not to be stopped by the police asking for documents. You have to speak faultless Russian otherwise people will ask if you’re ‘really Russian’.

“I’ve been told so many times to ‘go home’ that it felt like I should leave – I didn’t know where my home was but it seemed like it wasn’t in Russia.”

Just a week before she emigrated, a woman shouted racial slurs at Garmazhapova and her mother near their home in St. Petersburg. “I was shouting back at her...but my mother told me to leave it. If there’s a fight and a criminal case, she said it would be me who’s the guilty party.”

Like the other activists who spoke to VICE World News for this story, Garmazhapova pointed to the irony of Moscow’s aim of “de-Nazifying” Ukraine when violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities are so widespread at home, and the rights of ethnic Russians are so privileged.

The ultimate goal of the Free Buryatia Foundation is greater autonomy as a federal republic, with the right to preserve its own language and traditions. It opposes the increasingly centralised authority that has been imposed over Putin’s decades in power, crushing earlier hopes of a genuine federal system after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Some activists, however, go further – calling for their regions to break away from Russia and form new states.

Raisa Zubareva, who grew up in Yakutia, a vast region in Russia’s far east, says the invasion has exposed the imperial nature of Moscow’s rule and given fresh momentum to many Yakuts’ “dreams of ending hundreds of years of Russian occupation”.

“I have heard these sentiments since my childhood – from my family, from teachers. And now the time has come when the dreams of the Yakut intelligentsia may finally come true.”

Zubareva, a 45-year-old former journalist, left Russia for Poland in 2014, following Moscow’s invasion of Crimea. If she were still in the country, expressing such opinions could see her jailed for up to five years for “violating the territorial integrity” of the Russian Federation.

“We have been deprived of our language, our culture, our traditions,” Zubareva says of the Turkic ethnic group, which traditionally practises shamanism. She is working to establish a Free Yakutia foundation with other activists in the diaspora.

“The Ukrainians went through Russification, the imposition of the Russian World, just as we did,” she says.

“As cynical as this may sound, and a lot of people will shout at me for saying this, the war in Ukraine and the Ukrainian victims are a way for ethnic minorities in Russia to finally see what is really happening, how damaging this Russian occupation is, and how we need to break away from it to become completely free.”

The sentiment is shared by Abubakar Yangulbaev, a 30-year-old Chechen opposition activist who fled Russia under pressure from authorities last year. His family have also been targeted by the regime of regional leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Moscow cracked down ferociously on Chechnya after it tried to establish a breakaway republic in the 1990s, killing an estimated 300,000 people and laying waste to its capital, Grozny, over the course of two wars. Kadyrov is staunchly loyal to Putin, but that sentiment is not shared by all Chechens, who have enduring memories of the bloodshed.

“I never thought that Putin would launch the war in Ukraine because it reveals him for what he is, and other Russian conflicts for what they are. The Chechen wars were never about eliminating terrorists [as the Kremlin claimed] but about Russian colonialism.

“Of course Chechnya must be independent,” he says during a telephone interview from Prague.

Yangulbaev has been documenting how Chechen fighters have been deployed in the invasion, and argues that their actual impact has been over-represented in Ukrainian and Western reporting.

“There are only about 500 troops there,” he suggests, though official figures are not available. He also points to [the estimated hundreds of Chechen volunteers](#) fighting on the side of the Ukrainians, against “imperial enemy” Russia.

The activists admit that real change within Russia may be a long time coming, as the Kremlin continues to stamp out any opposition to the war and tighten its grip over the regions. But they believe that attitudes are shifting, and all hope one day to return to the places of their birth.

“If we can bring soldiers back home while ourselves living outside Russia, it is possible to change public opinion from abroad as well,” says Garmazhapova. “Nobody has had this conversation about ethnic minorities before. It’s been like this for a long, long time.

“Now people are feeling more able to say ‘I am Buryat’. Even people who have mixed-Buryat heritage. More people are deciding to learn the language. They feel prouder of who they are.”

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HEADLINE	08/24 China warns Canada over Taiwan visit
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/24/china-taiwan-canada-warning-planned-visit-mps
GIST	<p>China warned it will take “forceful measures” if Canada “interferes” in Taiwan, a week after it emerged that a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians was planning to visit the island later this year to explore trade opportunities.</p> <p>China claims Taiwan as its territory under its “one-China principle” and objects to foreign politicians visiting the island. Democratically governed Taiwan rejects China’s claims.</p> <p>“We urge the Canadian side to abide by the one-China principle and respect China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the Chinese embassy in Canada said in a statement sent late on Tuesday.</p> <p>“China will take resolute and forceful measures against any country that attempts to interfere with or infringe upon China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the Chinese embassy said.</p> <p>Members of a Canada-Taiwan parliamentary “friendship group”, which does not receive administrative or financial support from the Canadian parliament, had been planning to visit the self-ruled island in October, the Liberal MP Judy Sgro said last week.</p> <p>Sgro said the trip would focus on trade and the lawmakers’ intent was not to disrupt and cause problems for Taiwan or with China.</p>

	<p>In a statement, Canada's government said parliamentary associations and friendship groups were independent, and it respected the lawmakers' intent to visit Taiwan.</p> <p>Canada, like the rest of the west, follows a one-China policy that recognizes Beijing, not Taipei, diplomatically, while unofficially it supports Taiwan.</p> <p>The relationship between China and the west has worsened since US House of Representatives speaker, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan earlier this month against Beijing's wishes.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Russia to disconnect nuclear plant off grid?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/24/revealed-russian-plan-to-disconnect-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-from-grid
GIST	<p>A detailed plan has been drawn up by Russia to disconnect Europe's largest nuclear plant from Ukraine's power grid, risking a catastrophic failure of its cooling systems, the Guardian has been told.</p> <p>World leaders have called for the Zaporizhzhia site to be demilitarised after footage emerged of Russian army vehicles inside the plant, and have previously warned Russia against cutting it off from the Ukrainian grid and connecting it up to the Russian power network.</p> <p>But Petro Kotin, the head of Ukraine's atomic energy company, told the Guardian in an interview that Russian engineers had already drawn up a blueprint for a switch on the grounds of emergency planning should fighting sever remaining power connections.</p> <p>"They presented [the plan] to [workers at] the plant, and the plant [workers] presented it to us. The precondition for this plan was heavy damage of all lines which connect Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to the Ukrainian system," Kotin said in an interview on Ukraine's independence day on Wednesday, with the country mostly locked down because of the threat of Russian attacks.</p> <p>He fears that Russia's military is now targeting those connections to make the emergency scenario a reality. Both Ukraine and Russia have accused each other of shelling the site.</p> <p>"They just started doing that, they starting all the shelling, just to take out these lines," Kotin said.</p> <p>Other threats to nuclear security at the plant include vehicles packed so tightly into turbine halls that firefighters would struggle to access them if a fire broke out, and a campaign of terror against workers who have chosen to stay at the frontline plant.</p> <p>One was beaten to death, and another so severely injured that he needed three months to recover. More than 200 have been detained, Kotin said.</p> <p>The plant's electricity connections are already in a critical situation, with three of the four main lines connecting it to Ukraine's grid broken during the war, and two of the three back-up lines connecting it to a conventional power plant also down, he said.</p> <p>The Russian plan to disconnect it entirely would raise the risk of a catastrophic failure by leaving it dependent on a single source of electricity to cool the reactors. "You cannot just switch from one system to another immediately, you have to ... shut down everything on one side, and then you start to switch on another side," he said.</p> <p>During a shift between grid systems, the plant would be reliant only on a back-up diesel-powered generator, with no further options should that fail. After only 90 minutes without power the reactors would reach a dangerous temperature.</p>

“During this disconnection, the plant won’t be connected to any power supply and that is the reason for the danger,” he said. “If you fail to provide cooling ... for one hour and a half, then you will have melting already.”

Russia seized control of the Zaporizhzhia plant in March but it is still run by Ukrainian workers. There has been increasing alarm about Russian management of the site in recent weeks, and pressure on Moscow to allow UN inspectors to visit.

Kotin said inspectors from the UN’s nuclear watchdog could be at the plant within one or two weeks to check on security, after progress in negotiations with Russia about a visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Kotin is also concerned about the fire risk from vehicles packed into the turbine halls, which sit next to the two reactors still in operation. There are 14 trucks in one hall, and at least six in another, sources at the plant have told him.

“In case there is a fire in the turbine hall you don’t even have a possibility to put it out or mitigate the consequences of this fire, because your fire brigades cannot get in, because any entry is blocked by the trucks, which are just packed in there,” he said.

Any blaze could then potentially spread towards the reactor buildings, where a fire would have disastrous implications far beyond the immediate region.

“This situation is very dangerous not only for the plant, for Ukraine, but also for the whole world because you never can say what the weather would be like and what the wind direction [would be].”

Many other military vehicles are lined up under overpasses, built to house pipes and walkways between reactor and turbine complexes, Kotin said, perhaps to provide protection from drones.

He praised about 9,000 workers who are still on duty at the plant, from a prewar workforce of about 11,000. Many evacuated their families but stayed at their posts because of the need for a skilled team to operate it.

Modernisations to Ukraine’s nuclear plants in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster means that although the plant was built to Soviet specifications, Russian engineers don’t have the skills to operate it.

“Actually, for us they are heroes, just doing their job in such unbelievable conditions,” said Kotin, who knows the plant, and its workers well because he spent most of his career there. He arrived as a young graduate and rose to become general manager.

Rockets have also landed within two dozen metres of 174 spent fuel containers housed at the plant, which would be more vulnerable to weapons than the reactors, which are built to withstand the impact of a passenger jet.

“It will probably withstand two explosions of maybe two missiles on one container and after that, it will be broken,” he said. “Actually we had a rocket came in just 10, 20 metres just from the site [where the containers are stored].”

However, Kotin said that he hoped nuclear inspectors would be able to visit the Zaporizhzhia plant within “one, maybe two weeks”.

“There is progress in negotiations ... there is only modalities of the mission to finally agree between parties, and after that they will go. And actually I’ve seen some plans that they are to go at the end of the month.”

	<p>He said he also had confidence that Ukrainian workers who have sacrificed so much for the plant would be able to keep it safe.</p> <p>“In any case, we won’t allow Russians to bring the world to the nuclear catastrophe and we will do everything just to return the plant to under our full control and operate it safely reliably, like it always been.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Pandemic pause, student loan forgiveness
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-to-announce-student-loan-forgiveness-plan-11661331600?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>President Biden will forgive up to \$20,000 in federal student loan debt for tens of millions of Americans, a move that will provide unprecedented relief for borrowers but is certain to draw legal challenges and political pushback.</p> <p>Following more than a year of internal debate, the president said Wednesday that he will cancel \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for borrowers making under \$125,000 a year or couples making less than \$250,000 a year. In addition, those who receive federal Pell Grants and make less than \$125,000 a year would be eligible for total forgiveness of \$20,000, Mr. Biden said.</p> <p>“An entire generation is now saddled with unsustainable debt,” Mr. Biden said at the White House, adding that he wouldn’t apologize for what he characterized as a program to help the middle class.</p> <p>“I understand that not everything I’m announcing today is going to make everybody happy,” he said. “But I believe my plan is responsible and fair.”</p> <p>Independent estimates suggest the plan will cost more than \$300 billion over 10 years. The action will add to the federal deficit over time since borrowers will repay less, or none, of their loans to the federal government, but it doesn’t involve the immediate outlay of federal funds.</p> <p>The forgiveness applies to students with federal loans from undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as Parent Plus loans, White House officials said. While debt forgiveness is often treated as income for tax purposes, the canceled student debt will be exempt, like some other federal student debt forgiveness programs. The White House said borrowers who took out federal loans by June 30 of this year are eligible for forgiveness. Loans taken out after that date won’t be eligible.</p> <p>Mr. Biden also announced an extension of the pandemic pause on student loan payments through the end of this year. Loan payments were set to resume for millions of borrowers after Aug. 31. The Education Department will release more details on how borrowers can claim relief in the coming weeks and will make an application available before the repayment pause expires at the end of the year. Around eight million borrowers could be eligible for automatic relief, the department said, because it already has their income data.</p> <p>The plan was welcomed by advocacy groups and Democrats who have long pushed for loan forgiveness, though some previously called for a much broader program to erase more debt.</p> <p>Republican lawmakers quickly criticized the idea, and are likely to incorporate the topic into their midterm-election messaging. “Who will have to pay for Biden’s debt transfer scam? Hard-working Americans who already paid off their debts or never took on student loan debt in the first place,” House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) wrote on Twitter. The Republican National Committee called the plan “Biden’s bailout for the wealthy.”</p> <p>Jaime Harrison, the Democratic National Committee chair, said on Twitter that he was amazed Republicans would criticize the plan when they “practically trip over themselves to provide tax cuts & incentives to the richest corporations & Americans.”</p>

Economists say that a tailored debt cancellation plan is unlikely to exacerbate short-term inflationary pressures, but could add to them in the long term, especially if universities continue to raise tuition because students might expect their loans to eventually be canceled.

Even some economists usually aligned with the White House, including former Clinton administration Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and former Obama administration economist Jason Furman, have criticized the cost of a potential student debt cancellation and warn that it could force future spending cuts or tax increases.

A Biden administration official said Wednesday that the White House believes the package won't result in higher inflation, arguing that the combination of restarting loan payments and providing debt relief would either have no net impact or would decrease inflation slightly over time.

The plan to forgive around \$10,000 of student debt for borrowers who make under \$125,000 a year or around double that for married couples would include [most of the 40 million people with student debt](#).

Around 6 in 10 borrowers with any federal loans also received Pell Grants, which are a form of federal financial aid for undergraduate students. Including an income cap and increased benefits for Pell recipients could serve to shield the administration from criticism that debt cancellation is regressive and primarily benefits high-income and well-educated people. The combined actions could render up to 20 million borrowers free of student debt, according to the White House.

The inclusion of [Parent Plus loans](#) means millions of families who have taken on massive debt could see their debt load decreased. While the government imposes a limit on the amount of undergraduate debt a student can take out, the Parent Plus program lets people borrow the total cost of attendance—room and board, books and personal expenses on top of tuition—for as many years as it takes to get the degree.

Current students are also eligible for loan forgiveness, according to a senior administration official. But students who have been claimed as a dependent will have their eligibility determined based on their parents' or guardians' income, the official said. Borrowers who earned less than the \$125,000 income threshold in either the 2020 or 2021 tax year will be eligible for the loan relief, the official added.

To prevent student debt balances from ballooning in the future, the White House said it would propose a regulation that would cut from 10% to 5% the amount of discretionary income borrowers must pay each month on their undergraduate loans if they are enrolled in an income-driven repayment plan.

No borrower's loan balance will grow as long as they make their monthly payments, even if a low-income borrower's monthly requirement is set at \$0. The rule would also forgive loan balances for people enrolled in income-based plans after 10 years of payments, down from 20 under many of the current options, for borrowers whose original loan balances were \$12,000 or less.

Under the proposed regulation, enrolled borrowers making less than 225% of the federal poverty line wouldn't have to make monthly payments on their loans.

The administration is basing its legal authority for cancellation in part on the Covid-19 national emergency, citing financial harms suffered by borrowers. It also rescinded a Trump administration memo that concluded that legal authority doesn't exist for mass cancellation.

The announcement brings to a close a fierce debate within the administration over how to approach student loans. The president had long been skeptical of using his executive authority to forgive debt. He raised concerns in internal meetings that the measure could benefit wealthy people and instructed his staff to impose an income cap so the benefits didn't flow to individuals making lucrative salaries, according to administration officials and others familiar with the discussions.

The president started warming to the prospect of using his authority to forgive some debt in recent months as senior aides, including White House chief of staff Ron Klain, made the case that it would be popular with young voters. Other Biden advisers argued that the move would help minority and low-income borrowers and be a legacy-defining moment for the president.

But doubts about the economic and political consequences of loan forgiveness persisted at senior levels of the White House in recent weeks, with some worrying about backlash from people who didn't go to college, didn't take out loans or already paid them off. The impact of loan forgiveness on inflation was also an issue of concern for Mr. Biden and his team, the people said.

While several details were still being ironed out on Tuesday, the core components of the package had largely been set in stone. Mr. Biden's advisers presented the president with a memo several weeks ago that recommended taking action along the lines of what was announced on Wednesday. The additional relief for recipients of Pell Grants had been discussed internally for months, two of the people said, but had largely been kept secret, even as other details of the proposal leaked.

Over the past year, Mr. Biden's policy advisers weighed what one person described as a seemingly never-ending string of options for forgiving debt, including proposals to target loan forgiveness solely to people who do public service work and varying methods for calculating borrowers' income. The president's advisers discussed a higher income cap of \$150,000 a year for individuals and \$300,000 a year for couples, the people said. Loan forgiveness of \$50,000 per borrower, a proposal pushed by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D., Mass.) and other prominent progressive Democrats, was never seriously considered, another person said.

Early in the internal debate, Mr. Biden talked about restricting loan forgiveness solely to undergraduate students, leery of helping people attending expensive business schools, for example. But White House aides and others argued that such a restriction would prevent teachers and nurses from getting the aid, an argument that resonated with Mr. Biden, some of the people said.

Mr. Biden repeatedly delayed making a decision. In May, [he said he would make an announcement](#) within a "couple of weeks," which didn't come to fruition.

The loan forgiveness plan represents a sea change in the federal government's approach to higher education finance, and is a tacit admission that the decades-old programs designed to make college affordable haven't lived up to their promise.

"It's hard to wrap your head around how life changing this is going to be for so many people. It is almost cosmic in scale," said the Debt Collective, an activist group that has pushed for broad cancellation.

Polling has shown that Americans are divided on the issue of debt forgiveness, with support fluctuating depending on the details of the proposal. An NPR/Ipsos poll released in June found 55% support for the idea of forgiving up to \$10,000 in student loan debt.

The decision, just over two months ahead of the midterm elections, will likely spark legal and political backlash from opponents of mass debt forgiveness, including Republicans who believe that [voters will be turned off](#) by a policy that puts taxpayers on the hook for individuals' loans.

Sen. Raphael Warnock (D., Ga.), who faces a tough reelection race in November, welcomed the plan and said it "will help many Georgians," though he said he would push for additional debt relief and work to address "the underlying problem by making college more affordable."

But moderate Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan, who faces Republican J.D. Vance in [Ohio's closely watched Senate race](#), said the plan "sends the wrong message to the millions of Ohioans without a degree working just as hard to make ends meet."

	<p>Mr. Biden’s plan will test the legal limits of the federal government’s authority to cancel student debt. Its success could depend on how courts would interpret the education secretary’s powers under the 1965 Higher Education Act, which allows the secretary to “consent to modification” of loans, and “compromise, waive, or release” unspecified amounts of student debt.</p> <p>Advocates for broad cancellation say the lack of explicit constraints in the law is deliberate, giving the executive branch flexibility with its “compromise authority” to manage its relationship with borrowers. They note that presidents of both parties have used the law to forgive debt on a more-limited scale.</p> <p>Mr. Biden has previously raised questions about whether he has the power to take executive action to cancel student debt on a large scale. “I don’t think I have the authority to do it by signing with a pen,” Mr. Biden said during a CNN town hall last year. Some of Mr. Biden’s advisers also have privately raised concerns that broad debt forgiveness could face legal challenges, The Wall Street Journal has reported. Other advisers contend the president is on solid legal ground.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 New federal rule strengthens DACA
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-moves-to-strengthen-daca-with-a-new-rule-11661381662?mod=hp_lead_pos12
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Biden administration said it would transform the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which provides deportation protections to more than 600,000 young immigrants in the country illegally known as Dreamers, into a federal regulation to strengthen it against legal challenges.</p> <p>The new rule, published by the Department of Homeland Security on Wednesday, is set to take effect on Oct. 31, and will replace a memo issued in 2012 by then-Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano that governed the program for a decade.</p> <p>“Today, we are taking another step to do everything in our power to preserve and fortify DACA, an extraordinary program that has transformed the lives of so many Dreamers,” DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement.</p> <p>The program has been at the center of a yearslong legal battle focused in part on whether it was properly created.</p> <p>In July, a federal appeals court in New Orleans heard arguments on the legality of the program in a lawsuit brought by the state of Texas and other Republican-led states, and it could issue its decision upholding or striking down the program anytime.</p> <p>Last summer, a federal district judge in Texas ruled the program was illegal and barred the federal government from accepting new applicants, though he permitted existing DACA recipients to continue relying on its protections.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen, of the Southern District of Texas, argued, in part, that the program wasn’t properly implemented because the government didn’t elicit feedback from the public or adequately consider the effects of its creation on states, who would, for instance, be required to issue driver’s licenses to DACA recipients.</p> <p>The new regulation was created to alleviate that concern, though it likely wouldn’t address Judge Hanen’s additional argument that Congress never gave the administration such broad-based power to give an entire class of immigrants in the country illegally deportation relief.</p> <p>President Biden has made bringing stability to the program a priority, directing DHS to find ways to “preserve and fortify” DACA in an executive action on his first day in office.</p>

Return to Top	<p>“I will do everything within my power to protect Dreamers, but congressional Republicans should stop blocking a bill that provides a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers,” Mr. Biden said in a statement. Many congressional Republicans have expressed support for extending a path to citizenship to DACA recipients, though they disagree with the Democrats over how many Dreamers to make eligible for such a program. Republicans have also said such a measure must be coupled with new border security policies that Democrats oppose.</p> <p>The new DACA program would operate largely the same as the original created by the Obama administration in 2012. The program would carry the same eligibility criteria, which require that an immigrant in the country illegally arrived by June 2007 and before he or she was 16 years old.</p> <p>The program would continue to grant two years of deportation protection and a two-year work permit for a \$495 fee. And recipients could temporarily leave the country under a program known as advance parole, which gives them upfront permission to legally come back.</p> <p>Some outside groups had urged the Biden administration to expand eligibility criteria for DACA through the creation of the regulation, such as making eligible immigrants brought to the country as children after 2007, or including a separate population of so-called documented Dreamers, who aren’t covered by the parents’ visas after they turn 21. The administration opted not to expand the program to avoid further legal challenges.</p> <p>The Trump administration first attempted to end the program in September 2017, but it was blocked by federal courts. The Supreme Court ruled in June 2020 that it hadn’t taken the proper steps to do so.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Laid-off workers quickly find jobs
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-surprise-in-a-faltering-economy-laid-off-workers-quickly-find-jobs-11661333405?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>When Suki Lanh was laid off from a fintech insurance startup in early July, she worried it could take months to find a new job.</p> <p>“I was definitely nervous seeing the amount of startups that were laying off folks,” the 30-year-old said. “I just thought generally it was going to be really difficult to get another job for a while.”</p> <p>Ms. Lanh posted a video about her job loss on LinkedIn two days after she was let go amid broader cuts at a New York City-based startup. Recruiter messages started flooding her inbox.</p> <p>“I was honestly surprised at how many places were hiring or looking for someone,” she said.</p> <p>Within 2½ weeks, the Tampa, Fla., resident had advanced to final-stage interviews with seven companies and scored job offers from two of them. She accepted a remote copywriting job at Walgreens in late July with a salary about 50% higher than in her previous job. Ms. Lanh is looking forward to adding a modern, humorous flair to product advertisements for the pharmacy-store chain.</p> <p>Companies in a broadening array of industries are announcing layoffs as they struggle with declining business activity, rising interest rates, high inflation and shifting consumer-spending habits. Ford Motor Co. confirmed Monday it is laying off roughly 3,000 white-collar and contract employees, and furniture company Wayfair Inc. recently said it was laying off 5% of its global workforce.</p> <p>But one characteristic of today’s economy is that job cuts at small startups and large companies have yet to dent the overall labor market. Labor demand is still historically strong, offering only faint signs of cooling. There are nearly two job openings for every unemployed person seeking work. That means many workers who are losing their jobs are quickly landing jobs. Some are even weighing multiple offers and accepting positions that pay more and better align with their skills.</p>

“With unemployment so low, job openings so high and the quits rate so high, we’re finding that the balance of power is still with the job seeker,” said Paul McDonald, senior executive director at staffing firm Robert Half.

Initial jobless claims, the number of applications for state unemployment benefits, [have risen this summer](#) after hitting a half-century low in the spring. In the week ended Aug. 13, a seasonally adjusted 250,000 workers filed for benefits, above the 2019 prepandemic average of 218,000 and a sign that layoffs have ticked up.

Meanwhile, continuing claims, a proxy for the number of people claiming ongoing jobless benefits, have increased at a much slower rate. Continuing claims were about 1.4 million in the week ended Aug. 6, below their 2019 average of 1.7 million. Relatively low and stable continuing claims could indicate workers are leaving unemployment rolls quickly as they regain employment, some economists say.

Reggie Pearson, of Columbia, S.C., said he found out in a morning Zoom call earlier this month that he was losing his management job as part of broader layoffs at a health-insurance broker. Though he had been discussing a new job opportunity for several weeks with insurance company Baldwin Risk Partners, nothing was concrete. The 42-year-old thought it could take a month to secure a new job.

Around 1 p.m. ET that same day, a recruiter for Baldwin Risk called Mr. Pearson with a job offer in sales management. The recruiter told Mr. Pearson that this was the first time he had made a job offer to someone the same day they had also gotten laid off.

“I went from being lost and confused to being happy and excited and like, ‘man, this is a blessing,’” Mr. Pearson said.

By 2 p.m., he had received an offer letter, with an annual salary of \$115,000, well above his previous pay of \$60,000, he said. He signed it immediately. Mr. Pearson said he is excited to share his energy—powered by morning runs and lots of water—with colleagues in his new Charlotte, N.C., workplace. He also is helping recruit roughly 20 to 30 sales agents by October for the division he oversees.

The typical unemployed worker had been off the job for 8.5 weeks in July, down from 14.4 weeks a year earlier, according to the Labor Department. The shorter duration of unemployment suggests many unemployed Americans are finding jobs fast as fewer leave the labor force, said Julia Pollak, chief economist at ZipRecruiter.

Shorter episodes of joblessness [defy economists’ concerns earlier in the pandemic](#) that workers would suffer from long-term spells of unemployment of 27 weeks or more like they did after the 2007-09 recession.

The share of all jobless Americans unemployed for less than five weeks surpassed the share of those out of work for at least 27 weeks in January, according to the Labor Department. The gap has since widened. By July, nearly 37% of unemployed workers had been out of work less than five weeks, roughly double the percentage experiencing long-term joblessness.

Joel Flores of Highlands Ranch, Colo., said he never had to worry about filing for unemployment benefits because he found work so fast. The job-search process was much shorter than the 29-year-old initially expected when he was laid off from an accounting job at a landscaping company in late July.

“I was scared, first off, for the future of my family and what we were going to do,” Mr. Flores said. “You hear in the news the country is in a recession, and I was afraid that was really going to affect me finding a job.”

He started talking with multiple companies, speeding through interviews. Two weeks after his layoff, he had four job offers in hand. Mr. Flores chose to take a role as an operational accountant for a commercial-construction company.

Return to Top	<p>“Knowing that the demand was still out there for my skill set was really relieving,” he said.</p> <p>Employers had 10.7 million unfilled jobs in June, down from a record of 11.9 million in March, but still well above the 7 million job openings in February 2020 ahead of the pandemic, when the labor market was also booming.</p> <p>Job-openings rates across industries are much higher than before the pandemic hit, suggesting companies still need workers even in sectors where company layoffs have been pronounced, such as technology, real estate, finance and insurance.</p> <p>Longer periods of unemployment can allow job seekers more time to search for roles that match their skill sets, some economists say. But with job opportunities so abundant, many unemployed workers are finding jobs that suit them within a matter of weeks or even days.</p> <p>Jordan Max lost his job at the end of June as a software engineer at a home-fitness startup.</p> <p>“I had an ideal role pictured out when I first found out I got laid off, and I was thinking about what kind of job I wanted,” he said. Mr. Max wanted to lead a team and develop a product from the ground up.</p> <p>A little over a month later the 32-year-old accepted a job offer for a software-engineering position at Feastables, a snack company. The job aligned with what he was looking for, he said.</p> <p>“It was just a good match,” Mr. Max said. “I was definitely surprised, in a good way, of how fast it took.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Record numbers Cuban migrants
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/cuban-migrants-head-to-the-u-s-in-large-numbers-11661353200?mod=lead feature below a pos1
GIST	<p>MIAMI—Cuban migrants are arriving in the U.S. at the highest rate since Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, fleeing political repression and the island’s worst economic crisis in more than three decades.</p> <p>More than 175,000 Cuban migrants were apprehended in the U.S. between last October and July, six times as many as in the previous 12-month period, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.</p> <p>Most are young, single adults, according to government statistics. Many are relatively well educated, say people who work with the migrants.</p> <p>The exodus “reflects the desperation, the lack of hope, and the lack of future people on the island feel,” said Jorge Duany, head of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University.</p> <p>About 250,000 Cubans left the island in the years immediately after Mr. Castro’s takeover of Cuba in 1959, Mr. Duany said. The current wave also eclipses the roughly 125,000 Cubans who reached the U.S. in 1980 when Mr. Castro, facing a political crisis, allowed hundreds of boats, mostly crewed by Cuban-Americans, to pick them up at the port of Mariel.</p> <p>Another 30,000 Cubans set out for Florida on makeshift rafts in 1994 when Mr. Castro allowed them to migrate after thousands rioted in the capital Havana over the economic hardship brought on by the end of Soviet subsidies to the Caribbean island.</p> <p>Cuba’s current economic crisis sparked a wave of protests across the island in July 2021, which prompted a harsh response from security forces. In the following months the government brought charges against 930 protesters and sentenced 675 of them to prison terms, some as long as 25 years, according to Laritza Diversent, director of human-rights group Cubalex.</p>

With sanctions tightened by the Trump administration, Cuban economic mismanagement and the impact of the pandemic, inflation has soared, basic foods and medicines have become scarce, and money transfers from Cubans in the U.S. have dwindled. The flow of foreign tourists has also dried up.

Gloom on the island deepened after an Aug. 5 fire destroyed 40% of the fuel storage capacity at the port city of Matanzas, [leading to increased electricity outages](#) that even before the disaster were lasting up to 20 hours a day in many places.

“Cuba continues to bleed out talent, capacity, energy and resources,” said Alejandro de la Fuente, a professor of Cuban history at Harvard University. “They are selling everything they own to get out.” Cuban officials didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Today’s exodus is facilitated by Cuba’s close ally Nicaragua, which in November dropped visa requirements for Cubans to fly to the capital Managua. That opened a corridor for Cubans, mostly using “coyotes,” or people smugglers, to make their way overland to the U.S. through Central America and Mexico. The move has eased political and social pressure on the Cuban government as younger Cubans frustrated with conditions abandon the island.

In dozens of advertisements posted on Facebook, travel agents and people working out of homes in Miami, Havana, Managua, Panama and even in Nebraska, offer round-trip tickets on charter flights priced at between \$3,000 and \$4,000 from Cuban cities to Managua.

Due to the high cost of making the long trip to the U.S. via Nicaragua—as much as \$10,000—most of those taking that route are white Cubans who are more likely than Black Cubans [to have relatives living in the U.S.](#) who can fund the trek, Mr. de la Fuente said.

A State Department spokesperson said the U.S. is deeply concerned about the increase in Cuban migration. “Predatory businesses are taking advantage of their desperation, charging Cubans and their families exorbitant fees to leave the island,” the spokesperson said.

Once in the U.S., most of the Cuban migrants go to the Miami area where many have friends and family who help finance the newcomers’ trips.

“I’m trying to get my arms around the numbers,” said Esteban Bovo, mayor of Hialeah, Fla., a working-class city of more than 230,000 inhabitants next door to Miami that is considered to have the largest number of Cubans in the U.S.

So far many migrants have found shelter on the sofas and in the spare rooms of friends and relatives, while family networks have provided many of them with jobs off the books, says Pedro Freyre, a Cuban-American lawyer at Akerman LLP.

Florida state officials didn’t reply to requests for comment. Florida Lt. Gov. Jeanette Nuñez, a Cuban-American and a Republican, last week said in a radio interview that the new wave of Cuban immigrants would be “worse than Mariel” and suggested they be sent to President Biden’s home state of Delaware.

In Cuba last summer, amateur boxer Ermes Orta and a group of his friends were arrested by Cuban police in the central city of Sancti Spiritus in the wake of nationwide demonstrations that shook the Communist government.

The 20-year-old Mr. Orta spent a month in jail before being convicted of “criminal association and defiance” and fined about \$100. Cuban police hauled him in each week to the police station for questioning.

Mr. Orta saw no future in Cuba. His father sold a motorcycle, and an older brother, a bartender in Miami Beach, contributed some \$7,000 for Mr. Orta to buy an airline ticket to Nicaragua and pay a smuggler to guide him through Mexico to the U.S.

In Florida, Mr. Orta shares his brother's apartment and trains daily at a gym with a group of Cuban boxers. The 140-pound super-lightweight fighter hopes to turn professional soon.

"If my brother didn't get me out of Cuba, I was going to go to prison," he says in staccato, rapid-fire Spanish.

The trip is a dangerous one as migrants are often preyed upon by gangs as they move northward through Mexico.

Reyniel Sánchez, a 31-year-old electrical inspector, sold a motorcycle for \$2,000 and obtained money from his father, who runs a bus company in Miami, to fund the trip to the U.S. via Nicaragua.

Mr. Sánchez said he was repeatedly robbed and beaten in Mexico by armed assailants who he thought were members of a drug cartel. Near the U.S. border, a gang member put a gun to his head. He said two women that were traveling in his group were raped by gunmen. The migrant group was let go after relatives in the U.S. sent money to their captors, he said.

"I have a lot of nightmares," he says.

Most Cubans turn themselves in to Border Patrol agents, the first step in the process of asking for asylum, and they are typically released in the U.S. with papers telling them to report to immigration court. At least 1.8 million cases are pending in immigration court, according to government data, and Cubans are typically receiving court dates in 2024. It takes several years on average to complete a case.

Until the end of the Obama administration, Cubans typically received temporary legal status that led to a green card a year later as long as they didn't commit any crimes. That policy was ended in January 2017.

María, a Cuban-American housecleaner, has raised about \$8,000 with other relatives to help pay for two family members—Samuel, a nephew who just graduated as a surgeon, and his girlfriend, a medical student—to make the trip to Miami via the Nicaraguan route.

Samuel said as many as 50 classmates and friends have left the city of Colón in central Cuba, where he lived, in the past year. "Colón is empty of young people," he said.

The Wall Street Journal agreed to use only first names for a number of immigrants concerned about retribution in Cuba or working illegally in the U.S.

The Cubans can enroll in Medicaid and receive cash stipends of \$180 per person, as well as food stamps worth \$250, Miami-Dade county officials say. They can obtain a driver's license once they apply for asylum but aren't allowed work permits until about six months after they have applied for political asylum.

One sign of the wave of migration is the long line that encircles the Social Security building in Hialeah, where applicants, most of them recent arrivals, line up from early morning to fill out paperwork for a temporary Social Security card.

Ana, a teacher from the city of Santa Clara in central Cuba, said she was fired from her job there after she refused to march in Cuba's May Day parade to show loyalty to the regime. In the U.S., she wants to become a nurse's aide.

"I'm going to study and better myself," she said.

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/job-market-stronger-than-previously-reported-data-show-11661364957?mod=hp_major_pos2#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>The U.S. labor market pumped out more jobs in its recovery from the pandemic than previously thought.</p> <p>Employers added about 462,000 more jobs in the year through March than the Labor Department originally estimated, the agency said Wednesday as part of routine annual revisions. That means the economy added an average of nearly 39,000 more jobs each month for the year ended in March than previously thought.</p> <p>“It was hard to find words to describe how strong the job growth was over those 12 months, and now it’s even stronger,” said Heidi Shierholz, president of the liberal Economic Policy Institute. She said the change didn’t significantly alter what is known about the labor market’s performance.</p> <p>Companies have added jobs at a rapid pace over the past two years, seeking to fill roles to meet strengthening demand after steep cutbacks at the onset of the pandemic. The labor market is holding up better than many other parts of the economy that are buckling under the weight of high inflation, rising interest rates and shifting consumer spending.</p> <p>Wednesday’s updated figures on job gains came from an annual report known as a “benchmark revision.” Each month, the Labor Department publishes estimates on how many jobs employers added in the prior month, based on a survey of employers. But each year, the agency offers a more precise estimate of recent job growth based on more detailed data from state unemployment tax records.</p> <p>A final benchmark revision will be issued in February 2023.</p> <p>The new estimate highlighted the divergent paths of private- and public-sector employers. As of March, there were 571,000 more private-sector jobs and 109,000 fewer government jobs than originally estimated. Though private businesses have surpassed prepandemic payrolls levels, government employers have lagged behind as localities face challenges filling roles in schools, transit systems and hospitals.</p> <p>Most private-sector industries produced more jobs through March than previously thought, with the notable exception of retail. Retailers, like employers in many lower-wage industries, have struggled to hire as there are fewer workers looking for jobs than before Covid-19 hit in February 2020. Many have also announced layoffs in recent months.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 King Co. ODs, suicide, homicides near highs
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3607188/overdose-suicide-homicides-near-record-highs-according-report-medical-examiners-office/
GIST	<p>Homicides reached a high last year with 131 in 2021, the second time it has reached triple digits, according to the King County Medical Examiner’s (KCMEO) annual report. In 2020, there were 125 homicides.</p> <p>Overdose deaths are also above regional averages, with 523 deaths in 2021 already overtaking the amount of overdose deaths in 2020. Fentanyl and methamphetamine have been cited as the most common overdose drugs.</p> <p>According to the new report, in 2021, 365 people overdosed on methamphetamine and 385 people overdosed on fentanyl, with fentanyl overtaking methamphetamine usage for the first time.</p> <p>Suicides are also significantly higher, with 268 suicide deaths in 2020 and 331 in 2021.</p> <p>KCMEO released its annual report on deaths in the area, bringing new light to how people die in the county in 2021. KCMEO – which investigates sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious, and unnatural deaths – has released a yearly report since 2006.</p>

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HEADLINE	08/24 US \$3B military aid package to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/world/europe/biden-ukraine-aid.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden said on Wednesday that the United States would deliver nearly \$3 billion worth of arms and equipment to Ukraine, its largest single package of military aid aimed at helping the nation battle Russian forces.</p> <p>The announcement, on Ukraine’s Independence Day and the six-month anniversary of the war, signaled Mr. Biden’s continuing determination to assist in the fight against Russia’s invasion.</p> <p>In a statement, Mr. Biden said the latest financial assistance would allow Ukraine to purchase “air defense systems, artillery systems and munitions, counter-unmanned aerial systems, and radars to ensure it can continue to defend itself over the long term.”</p> <p>The effort to bolster Ukraine’s military, which has garnered bipartisan support in Congress, has now delivered more than \$10 billion worth of weapons and other equipment. The aid announced on Wednesday is part of the \$40 billion assistance package Congress approved in May.</p> <p>Mr. Biden acknowledged the suffering of the Ukrainian people, but pledged to ensure that the country’s sovereignty would be protected.</p> <p>“Thousands have been killed or wounded, millions have been displaced from their homes, and so many others have fallen victim to Russian atrocities and attacks,” he said. “But six months of relentless attacks have only strengthened Ukrainians’ pride in themselves, in their country, and in their 31 years of independence.”</p> <p>Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, the White House has prioritized sending weapons and military goods from the Pentagon’s own stockpiles to Ukraine, authorizing more than \$8 billion in rockets, missiles, firearms, vehicles and other hardware from Defense Department supplies.</p> <p>But Wednesday’s announcement could signal a significant shift in how the United States will support Ukrainian forces in the future. The \$3 billion President Biden pledged will go to the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, a fund that allows Ukrainian leaders to purchase military goods directly from the defense industry.</p> <p>Shifting the source of Ukrainian military supplies from the Pentagon’s own stockpile, which is large but not limitless, to items newly manufactured by the defense industry indicates that the White House and military leaders are transitioning to a sustainable model Kyiv can depend on for an open-ended war with Russia.</p> <p>“This announcement represents the beginning of a contracting process to provide additional priority capabilities to Ukraine in the mid- and long-term to ensure Ukraine can continue to defend itself as an independent, sovereign and prosperous state,” Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement emailed to reporters Wednesday afternoon. “It is the biggest tranche of security assistance for Ukraine to date.”</p> <p>The fund was set up in the wake of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and according to a report from the Congressional Research Service, disbursed more than \$1.3 billion to Kyiv from 2016 to 2021, which has gone toward sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, counter-artillery radars, patrol boats, night vision devices and other matériel.</p> <p>According to General Ryder, the \$3 billion announced on Wednesday will be used for six new NASAMS air-defense missile systems and additional ammunition for the two NASAMS launchers the United States</p>

	previously provided with Security Assistance Initiative funds in July, as well as up to 245,000 additional rounds of 155-millimeter artillery ammunition and 65,000 rounds of 120-millimeter mortar ammunition — up from the 561,000 155-millimeter and 20,000 120-millimeter rounds previously sent to Ukraine. The money will also purchase more drones and anti-drone systems, laser-guided rockets and radars designed to track incoming enemy artillery fire.
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HEADLINE	08/24 US: incredibly large missile build up China
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/24/air-force-incredibly-large-missile-buildup-china/
GIST	<p>China's military is engaged in a large-scale expansion of both nuclear and conventional missiles described in a U.S. Air Force Air University report as "incredibly" large and rapidly increasing.</p> <p>The report by the China Aerospace Studies Institute at the university said the People's Liberation Army's Rocket Force, formerly the 2nd Artillery, is expanding both in the sophistication of its missiles and size of its arsenal. The growth in both missiles and launchers was based on increasing numbers of Rocket Force brigades and highlights the rapid buildup.</p> <p>From 1980 to 2000, the PLA added four new missile brigades, including three armed with the latest weapons.</p> <p>"This expansion accelerated in the 2000s: between 2000 and 2010, the 2nd Artillery stood up as many as 11 new brigades equipped with its growing array of weapons, including its first ground-launched cruise missile, the CJ-10, and its first self-contained road-mobile ICBM, the DF-31, as well as the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile," the report said.</p> <p>The speed of the missile buildup intensified between 2010 and 2020 with the addition of 13 new brigades along with the longer-range and multi-warhead DF-41 road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile; the dual nuclear-conventional DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missiles; and deployment of the world's first hypersonic missile, the DF-17.</p> <p>"Incredibly, between 2017 and late 2019 the PLARF added at least ten new missile brigades," the report said. "This unprecedented expansion from 29 to 39 brigades represents a more than 33% increase in size in only three years."</p> <p>China's leaders also made the Rocket Force a centerpiece of a 2015 military reform by upgrading the force to a full military service. At the same time, the ground, air and naval forces were either reduced in size or lost direct control of forces to a new joint theater command structure.</p> <p>"Thus, the PLARF has evolved from a small, unsophisticated force of short-ranged and vulnerable ballistic missiles to an increasingly large, modern and formidable force with a wide array of both nuclear and conventional weapons platforms," the report said.</p> <p>The report did not say how many missiles were involved in the expansion.</p> <p>Military analysts have stated a typical PLA missile brigade deploys between nine and 54 launchers depending on the missile type. The actual number of missiles is estimated to be 20% to 25% larger than the number of launchers.</p> <p>Long-range DF-31 brigades come with 12 launchers and DF-41 Brigades have 10 or 12 launchers. Short-range DF-15 brigades are equipped with between 32 and 36 launchers. Land attack cruise missile brigades are equipped with as many as 27 transporter-erector launchers. The differences in launcher numbers are based on infrastructure and command and control requirements.</p> <p>Each missile brigade includes between 4,000 and 6,000 troops.</p>

The Pentagon's most recent report on Chinese military power states that the PLA has around 100 ICBMs, along with an unspecified number of short-, medium- and intermediate-range missiles. That number of ICBMs is expanding rapidly with recent disclosures that as many as 360 silos for new multi-warhead DF-41 ICBMs are under construction in western China.

China's conventional missile strength is estimated to be more than 2,200 ballistic and cruise missiles, considered the largest missile force in the world. More than 1,000 missiles are deployed within range of Taiwan, a key target of Chinese military strategy.

Adm. Charles Richard, commander of the Strategic Command, said China's missile expansion is one element of a major nuclear buildup. The number of road-mobile missiles in China doubled in the past few years, he told Congress in May.

Army Maj. Christopher Mihal, a nuclear and counter-weapons of mass destruction officer in the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration, said that, in addition to numbers, the accuracy of some Chinese missiles increased as much as 800%.

For example, China's first nuclear missile, the DF-3A was assessed to be capable of hitting a target within a radius of more than 13,000 feet. By contrast, the new DF-41 can hit targets within a radius of between 328 feet and 1,640 feet.

Maj. Mihal said China's missiles are "perhaps China's most valuable current military asset as [they provide] China both offensive and defensive capabilities against a wide range of opponents, as well as the inherent value of deterrence that nuclear weapons provide any nation."

China's missile force, while large, lacks large stockpiles of missiles, he added.

"China does not possess vast stockpiles of missiles; in a protracted conflict, the utility of the PLARF will diminish rapidly," Maj. Mihal wrote recently in the Army journal Military Review.

"This is doubly true for the nuclear arm of the PLARF. China simply does not have enough nuclear missiles to warrant a nuclear exchange, though Chinese defense white papers of the last decade have stressed an 'escalate to de-escalate' concept regarding nuclear employment."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Rents hit record high 17th month in a row
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/24/rents-hit-record-high-17th-month-row/
GIST	<p>Monthly rents in the U.S. hit a record high for the 17th month in a row in July, according to a report from Realtor.com.</p> <p>The median national rent for July was \$1,879 a month, a double-digit percentage increase from a year ago. Rent for studio apartments rose 14.3%, while one-bedrooms climbed 12.2% and two bedrooms went up 11.2%.</p> <p>On average, new leases saw a jump of \$300 while lease renewals on average jumped \$160.</p> <p>Many renters are struggling to keep up with the cost of living, which includes monthly rent. Moving to a new apartment is often more expensive than enduring a yearly rent increase, according to the report.</p> <p>While cities have seen the biggest rent increases, suburban areas are not far behind.</p> <p>"Compared to three years ago when rental price premiums were typically concentrated in urban hubs, renting is now nearly as expensive in the suburbs, where the rise in remote work has driven a surge in demand," said Realtor.com's chief economist, Danielle Hale.</p> <p>In July, rent in cities increased by an average of 12.8%, while suburban areas were just behind at 11.7%.</p>

	<p>Miami saw the largest increase, with prices rising 26.2% from last year. But other major cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago are right behind.</p> <p>Landlords cited higher costs for maintenance and utilities as the main drivers for the increases. Fewer homes are being sold as mortgage rates rise, with home sales falling for the sixth month in a row in July.</p> <p>But some good news for renters: The data suggests a cooldown in the future. The most recent median rent increase is the smallest in the 17-month streak. But experts suggest that doesn't mean rents will be dropping anytime soon.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Japan considers return to nuclear power
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/25/japan-eyes-return-to-nuclear-power-more-than-a-decade-after-fukushima-disaster
GIST	<p>Japan is considering building next-generation nuclear reactors and restarting idled plants in a major policy shift, 11 years after the triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant rocked the country's dependence on atomic energy.</p> <p>The prime minister, Fumio Kishida, said he had directed a government panel to look into how "next-generation nuclear reactors equipped with new safety mechanisms" could be used to help Japan achieve its goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. His "green transformation" council is expected to report back by the end of the year, he said on Wednesday.</p> <p>The change of direction, which could include extending the lifespan of existing reactors, have highlighted Japan's struggle to secure a stable energy supply as a result of the war in Ukraine and soaring energy costs.</p> <p>Successive governments have been forced to lower Japan's dependence on nuclear since the March 2011 disaster, when a powerful tsunami destroyed Fukushima Daiichi's backup electricity supply, causing three of its six reactors to suffer meltdowns.</p> <p>Most of Japan's nuclear plants have remained idle ever since, while the government said it would not build new reactors or replace ageing reactors, fearing a public backlash.</p> <p>If realised, Kishida's plans would mark a dramatic reversal of that stance.</p> <p>"Russia's invasion of Ukraine has vastly transformed the world's energy landscape ... Japan needs to bear in mind potential crisis scenarios," he said at an energy policy meeting this week.</p> <p>"To overcome an imminent crisis caused of a power supply crunch, we must take the utmost steps to mobilise all possible policies in the coming years and prepare for any emergency."</p> <p>The economy and industry minister, Yasutoshi Nishimura, said it was "extremely important to secure all options to redesign a stable energy supply for our country. From that perspective, we will also consider all options regarding nuclear power."</p> <p>Kishida conceded that the government would have to win support from the public, which turned against nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima meltdown. Officials believe voters have become more receptive to nuclear power due to rising fuel costs and after an energy crunch in Tokyo during a recent heatwave. The country is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels.</p> <p>"It is the first step towards the normalisation of Japan's energy policy," said Jun Arima, a project professor at the Tokyo University's graduate school of public policy.</p>

Seven reactors are currently in operation, with three others offline for regular safety inspections. Dozens of others are still going through a relicensing process under stricter safety standards introduced after the 2011 disaster, which some experts blamed on the “[nuclear village](#)” of operators, politicians and regulators.

A bigger role for nuclear in Japan’s energy mix could see seven additional reactors being restarted after next summer, including two at [Kashiwazaki-Kariwa](#), the biggest nuclear plant in the world. Restarting the plant would be particularly controversial, since it is run by Tokyo Electric Power, the same company that operates Fukushima Daiichi.

The 2011 disaster sent huge quantities of radiation into the atmosphere and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. Some areas near the plant remain off-limits, while others have only recently [reopened to residents](#).

The government will also consider extending the lifespan of existing reactors beyond the legal limit by excluding the period they remained shut down – in some cases several years – when calculating their operating time.

Plants can operate for up to 40 years in principle, but can continue generating electricity for another 20 years if they undergo safety upgrades and pass screenings conducted by regulators.

Japan has set a target for [nuclear power](#) generation to account for 20-22% of its electricity supply in 2030. Before the Fukushima meltdowns, about a third of its power generation came from nuclear, but in 2020 the figure was less than 5%.

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HEADLINE	08/25 Day 183 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/25/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-183-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Russia plans to disconnect Europe’s largest nuclear plant from Ukraine’s power grid, risking a catastrophic failure of its cooling systems, the Guardian has been told. Petro Kotin, the head of Ukraine’s atomic energy company, said Russian engineers had drawn up a blueprint for a switch on the grounds of emergency planning should fighting sever remaining power connections. “The precondition for this plan was heavy damage of all lines which connect Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant to the Ukrainian system,” Kotin said.• At least 22 people have been killed and 50 wounded in a Russian rocket strike on a Ukrainian railway station, as the country marked a sombre independence day, and six months since Moscow’s invasion started. Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said the rockets struck a train in a station in the town of Chaplyne, about 145km (90 miles) west of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. “Chaplyne is our pain today. As of this moment, there are 22 dead, five of them burned in the car, an 11-year-old teenager died,” he said adding that the death toll could increase as rescue operations continue.• Zelenskiy says Russia has placed the world “on the brink of a radiation disaster”. “It is a fact that the Russian military made the territory of the largest nuclear power plant in Europe a combat zone ... Now all of Europe and all neighbouring regions are under the threat of radiation pollution,” he said in a Wednesday evening address. Zelenskiy also called for th UN’s nuclear watchdog to take “permanent control” of the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.• US president Joe Biden confirmed a further \$3bn (£2.5bn) in military aid, including anti-aircraft missiles, artillery, counter-drone defences and radar equipment. US officials said the equipment, which will have to be ordered and will not be delivered for months or years, represented a longer-term investment in Ukrainian security. It is the biggest tranche of US military aid to date.• The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, visited Ukraine for the third time since Russia invaded, urging the international community to “stay the course” in its support. Announcing

	<p>£54m in support, he told Zelenskiy that Ukraine “can and will win the war”. Other senior politicians from across Europe travelled to Kyiv to show their support in person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moscow is making preparations to stage referendums in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, according to US intelligence. “We have information that Russia continues to prepare to hold these sham referendum in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and the so called Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics,” spokesperson for Biden’s national security council, John Kirby, said. “We’ve also learned that the Russian leadership has instructed officials to begin preparing to hold sham referenda, particularly in Kharkiv as well. And these referenda could begin in a matter of days or weeks.” • Plans by Russian-backed authorities to try Ukrainian prisoners of war in Mariupol would be a “mockery of justice”, the US secretary of state spokesperson, Ned Price, said. “The planned show trials are illegitimate and a mockery of justice, and we strongly condemn them,” he said on Wednesday. • Russia has claimed that the slowing pace of its military campaign in Ukraine is deliberate, and driven by the need to reduce civilian casualties. Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, said: “Everything is being done to avoid casualties among civilians. Of course, this slows down the pace of the offensive, but we are doing this deliberately.” Ukraine’s top military intelligence official, Kyrylo Budanov, said Russia’s offensive was slowing because of moral and physical fatigue in its ranks and Moscow’s “exhausted” resource base. • Britain is importing no energy from Russia for the first time on record. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released six months after the start of the war found that in June the UK’s imports from Russia were down by 97% and stood at only £33m as sanctions took effect.
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HEADLINE	08/24 China alert: heatwave puts crops at risk
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/24/china-issues-alert-drought-heatwave-put-crops-at-risk
GIST	<p>A drought in China is threatening food production, prompting the government to order local authorities to take all available measures to ensure crops survive the hottest summer on record.</p> <p>On Tuesday, four government departments issued an urgent joint emergency notice, warning that the autumn harvest was under “severe threat”. It urged local authorities to ensure “every unit of water ... be used carefully”, and called for methods included staggered irrigation, the diversion of new water sources, and cloud seeding.</p> <p>A record-breaking heatwave combined with a months-long drought during the usual flood season has wreaked havoc across China’s usually water-rich south. It has dried up parts of the Yangtze River and dozens of tributaries, drastically affecting hydropower capacity and causing rolling blackouts and power rationing as demand for electricity spikes. There is now concern about future food supply.</p> <p>Even Pay, an analyst at Trivium China who specialises in agriculture, said her immediate concern was for fresh produce.</p> <p>“The kinds of fresh vegetables that supply the local markets where people buy their produce each day – that’s the category that is least likely to be in a major irrigation area, and which is not likely to be strategically prioritised in a national push to protect grain and oil feeds,” she said.</p> <p>Crop losses would also hit supply chains and exacerbate supply problems, Pay said, as a Chinese city’s produce supply was often grown close to that city, but would have to be sourced from further away and could rot on longer journeys.</p> <p>Pay said the concerns were mainly domestic, and that categories of food that would affect the global markets were “keeping pretty safe”. But she said attention should be paid to rapeseed if the drought was still going when crops are planted in the autumn.</p>

China is now relying more heavily on its own corn production – 4% of which was grown in drought affected Sichuan and Anhui – after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine drastically destabilised global supplies.

Pay added: “I think we’re going to start to see reports of livestock farmers getting hit. A lot of pig farmers have upscaled in recent years ... There are big intensive vertical farms, and if the AC gets cut off [the pigs] are not going to be in good shape.”

Pay was relatively optimistic about the measures announced on Tuesday, and its call for tailored local solutions. The order to divert water sources would probably help areas where water is inaccessible, she said, and subsidies have already been announced.

“But we’ve now had 35 straight days of heat warnings. We have dry season water levels, or below typical dry season water levels. The conditions are very, very extreme and there’s no question that there will be some loss of crops.”

Tuesday’s notice heavily emphasised that it came from the highest levels of government, partially titled “emergency notice on thoroughly implementing the spirit of general secretary Xi Jinping’s important instructions”.

“That’s a really important signal to localities that there is a very high degree of political will behind the push to do anything and everything possible to support farmers and ensure crops can be saved,” said Pay.

It was also a sign of the pressure on China’s Communist party to avoid food price rises and inflation, as it prepares for its five-yearly congress meeting in the coming months.

“It’s signalling to markets, anyone with the jitters, or thinking of stocking up on food, that: hey everybody is mobilised and we’re going to do everything we can,” said Pay. “It’s also signalling to local province and county level governments that they need to get out and be seen to do something even if there is nothing that can be done.”

China has made climate crisis commitments to peak its carbon output before 2030, but – along with some European countries – has recently reprioritised coal production to stave off a global energy crisis.

Pay said China was making big efforts in adaptability. She said the hydropower failure in Sichuan – where it contributes 80% of power supply – would probably lead to a fossil fuel-driven response in the short term before efforts to boost other renewable sources which had struggled to compete with cheap hydropower.

“What’s happening this summer is going to be the base case for what a climate emergency looks like, and we’re likely to see a lot of policy research and redesign ... and a lot more attention around water availability.”

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HEADLINE	08/25 Togo ends 4 neglected tropical diseases
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/25/togo-achieves-major-feat-of-eradicating-four-neglected-tropical-diseases
GIST	<p>Togo has been praised by the World Health Organization for becoming the first country in the world to eliminate four neglected tropical diseases.</p> <p>The WHO presented the west African country with an outstanding achievement award this week for eliminating Guinea worm, lymphatic filariasis, sleeping sickness and trachoma in just 11 years.</p> <p>“Togo has achieved a major feat,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO’s regional director for Africa. “This achievement is an example for the rest of Africa and shows what is possible when health is made a priority.”</p>

The country eliminated Guinea worm in 2011, then became the [first country in sub-Saharan Africa](#) to stamp out lymphatic filariasis, in 2017, and sleeping sickness, in 2020. This year, it successfully eliminated trachoma.

Togo's president, Faure Gnassingbé, said: "Health is a priority that we have placed at the heart of our development policies."

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of 20 preventable, treatable conditions that are often left out of health budgets and global funding priorities.

Efforts to control or eradicate the diseases were ramped up in 2012 when 100 donor countries, private philanthropists, pharmaceutical companies, research institutions and civil society organisations came together to endorse the [London declaration](#) to control or eliminate 10 NTDs by 2020.

Since 2012, 46 countries have eliminated at least one NTD and more than 14bn treatments have been donated by pharmaceutical companies.

Three months ago, world leaders meeting in Rwanda's capital, Kigali, reconfirmed their commitments and agreed to eradicating NTDs by 2030.

About 1.7 billion people around the world are still affected by NTDs, which can disfigure and disable, trapping individuals and whole communities in cycles of extreme poverty.

About 40% of people affected by NTDs live in Africa. The [number of people](#) requiring treatment for at least one disease on the continent is slowly falling. In 2015, 630 million people were in need of treatment; by 2020 the figure had reduced to 598 million.

Thoko Elphick-Pooley, the director of the global partnership Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases, said Togo's success was due to "committed country and political ownership". "I hope that leaders across Africa are inspired by the incredible actions taken by Togo to transform the health of its citizens," she added.

Last year, the organisation warned that [UK government aid cuts](#) could have a devastating impact on progress to tackle NTDs.

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HEADLINE	08/25 WHO: monkeypox cases drop 21%
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/monkeypox-health-world-news-united-nations-9e39c89c4f2a0dc76b86077a59a544ae
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The number of monkeypox cases reported globally dropped by 21% in the last week, reversing a month-long trend of rising infections and a possible signal the outbreak in Europe may be starting to decline, according to a World Health Organization report issued Thursday.</p> <p>The U.N. health agency reported 5,907 new weekly cases and said two countries, Iran and Indonesia, reported their first cases. To date, more than 45,000 cases have been reported in 98 countries since late April.</p> <p>Cases in the Americas accounted for 60% of cases in the past month, WHO said, while cases in Europe comprised about 38%. It said infections in the Americas showed "a continuing steep rise."</p> <p>The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday the continent had 219 new cases reported in the past week, a jump of 54%. Most were in Nigeria and Congo, the agency said.</p>

In early July, just weeks before the agency declared the international spread of the disease to be a [global emergency](#), WHO's Europe director said countries in the region were responsible for 90% of all laboratory confirmed cases of monkeypox.

British health authorities said last week after seeing a decline in the number of new cases getting reported daily that there were ["early signs"](#) the country's monkeypox outbreak was slowing.

The U.K.'s Health Security Agency downgraded the country's monkeypox outbreak last month, saying there was no evidence the once rare disease was spreading beyond men who were gay, bisexual or had sex with other men.

Since monkeypox outbreaks in Europe and North America were identified in May, WHO and other health agencies have noted that its spread was almost exclusively in men who have sex with men.

[Monkeypox](#) has been endemic in parts of [Africa](#) for decades and experts suspect the outbreaks in Europe and North America were triggered after the disease started [spreading via sex](#) at two raves in Spain and Belgium.

WHO's latest report said 98% of cases are in men and of those who reported sexual orientation, 96% are in men who have sex with men.

"Of all reported types of transmission, a sexual encounter was reported most commonly," WHO said. "The majority of cases were likely exposed in a party with [sexual contacts](#)," the agency said.

Among the monkeypox cases in which the HIV status of patients was known, 45% were infected with HIV.

WHO has recommended that men at high risk of the disease temporarily consider [reducing their number of sex partners](#) or refrain from group or anonymous sex.

Monkeypox typically requires skin-to-skin or skin-to-mouth contact with an infected patient's lesions to spread. People can also become infected through contact with the clothing or bedsheets of someone who has monkeypox lesions.

With globally limited [vaccine supplies](#), authorities in the [U.S.](#), Europe and [the U.K.](#) have all begun rationing doses to stretch supplies by up to five times.

WHO has advised countries that have vaccines to prioritize immunization for those at high risk of the disease, including gay and bisexual men with multiple sex partners, and for health workers, laboratory staff and outbreak responders.

While [Africa has reported](#) the most suspected deaths from monkeypox, the continent has no vaccine supplies apart from a very small stock being tested in a research study in Congo.

"As we know, the situation with monkeypox vaccine access is very topical, but there are not enough doses of vaccines," Nigeria Center for Disease Control Director-General Ifedayo Adetifa said this week. Potentially, a lot more more doses will become available, but because of challenges with manufacturing factories and unexpected uptick in monkeypox cases, the vaccine may actually not be available until 2023."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Whatcom Co. flood recovery funds run out
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/homeowners-concerned-for-winter-months-as-whatcom-county-flood-recovery-funds-run-out

GIST	<p>SUMAS, Wash. - Despite the recent warm weather, hundreds of flood survivors in Whatcom County are dreading the upcoming fall and winter rains because their homes have yet to be repaired from the floods of last November.</p> <p>The deputy director for the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management, John Gargett, said 1,900 people have filed for flooding assistance with FEMA since the 2021 flooding. He said 90 families are in the process of having their properties bought out by the federal government because they won't be allowed to be rebuilt, or they are waiting for federal funding to have their home's foundation lifted to a new flood level elevations.</p> <p>Gargett said it can take years for that kind of funding to be handed out.</p> <p>"FEMA doesn't pay to complete repair homes. They don't do that-- [it's] a big misnomer," said Gargett.</p> <p>According to Gargett, the average loss to a house in Whatcom County from the November 2021 flooding was from \$30,000 to \$32,000. The average payout from FEMA was about \$5,000, he said.</p> <p>Sumas resident Diane Ackerman said FEMA gave her \$10,000, but she needs about \$30,000 for the repairs. She was also ineligible for flood insurance because her bank told her she did not live in a flood zone.</p> <p>"Every day I have off, I try and get more and more done," said Ackerman, who is doing her own repairs to her home.</p> <p>She never thought that 10 months after flood waters nearly destroyed her home that it would still be in the condition that it's in: livable, but without insulation in some rooms and no siding on the outer walls of the home.</p> <p>The non-profit Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group is working to fill in the holes that FEMA and government funding don't cover. The group is funded by private donations and is made possible by construction workers donating their time.</p> <p>The group is working to provide repairs to 55 homes and has collected \$550,000 for the effort. In October, volunteer construction workers will be coming to town to help with repairs before the rains begin.</p> <p>"There are three phases of recovery and the phase that we are in right now is disillusionment," said Lacey De Lange, the lead case manager for the group, of the flood survivors she deals with. "It's the hardest phase to be in emotionally."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 UW ranked 17th best university in world
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/uw-ranked-17th-best-university-in-the-world
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The University of Washington is one of the best in the world, according to a global ranking of universities.</p> <p>The Academic Ranking of World Universities was released earlier this month and placed UW at No. 17 globally and no. 3 among U.S. public universities.</p> <p>Atmospheric science, oceanography and public health were ranked as the school's best subjects.</p> <p>There are 1,000 universities on the list and eight American universities were in the top 10.</p> <p>Washington State University landed among the schools ranked in the "301-400" range.</p>

	According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities' website, the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy has been publishing the rankings since 2009. The global ranking was first established in 2003 by Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Center for World-Class Universities.
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HEADLINE	08/24 Calif. moves to ban sale of new gasoline cars
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/climate/california-gas-cars-emissions.html
GIST	<p>California regulators on Thursday will vote to put in place a sweeping plan to restrict and ultimately ban the sale of gasoline-powered cars, state officials said, a move that the state's governor described as the beginning of the end for the internal combustion engine.</p> <p>The new policy, detailed Wednesday morning in a news conference, is widely expected to accelerate the global transition toward electric vehicles. Not only is California the largest auto market in the United States, but more than a dozen other states typically follow California's lead when setting their own auto emissions standards.</p> <p>If those states follow through, and most are expected to adopt similar rules, the restrictions would apply to about a third of the United States auto market.</p> <p>"This is huge," said Margo Oge, an electric vehicles expert who headed the Environmental Protection Agency's transportation emissions program under Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. As additional states put in place their own versions of these policies, "they will drive the market, and drive innovation," she said.</p> <p>The rule, issued by the California Air Resources Board, will require that all new cars sold in the state by 2035 be free of greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide. The rule also sets interim targets, requiring that 35 percent of new passenger vehicles sold by 2026 produce zero emissions. That requirement climbs to 68 percent by 2030.</p> <p>Transportation is the nation's top source of planet-warming greenhouse-gas emissions.</p> <p>Gavin Newsom, the governor of California, called the new rule "one of the most significant steps to the elimination of the tailpipe as we know it."</p> <p>"Our kids are going to act like it's a rotary phone, or changing the channel on a television," Governor Newsom said in an interview.</p> <p>John Bozzella, president of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents large U.S. and foreign automakers, said that automakers wanted to see more electric vehicles on the roads, but that California's mandates would be "extremely challenging" to meet.</p> <p>"Whether or not these requirements are realistic or achievable is directly linked to external factors like inflation, charging and fuel infrastructure, supply chains, labor, critical mineral availability and pricing, and the ongoing semiconductor shortage," Mr. Bozzella said by email.</p> <p>President Trump had fought California's authority under the Clean Air Act to set its own rules regulating automobile pollution, and there remains the possibility that a future president might fight full implementation of the new rules. In addition, a group of attorneys general from Republican states have filed a lawsuit challenging California's ability to set its own pollution rules.</p> <p>Critics of policies that encourage the rapid adoption of electric vehicles point out that sticker prices for electrics are still much higher than for similar gasoline powered cars. And Ann Bluntzer, the executive director of the Ralph Lowe Energy Institute at Texas Christian University, said in a statement that the conversion to electric vehicles could put a strain on electricity grids.</p>

“Where is that increased power being sourced from?” Ms. Bluntzer said. “Fossil fuels? Wind? Solar? Hydro?”

California’s ban comes as gasoline prices continue to fall, this week dropping to a national average of \$3.90 a gallon. Still, Mr. Newsom said, the fact that prices shot up after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine underscored the urgency to “transition away from petro-dictators and dependency on the oil markets.”

The new policy in California follows an [expansive new climate law](#) signed by President Biden last week. The law will invest \$370 billion in spending and tax credits on clean energy programs, the largest action taken by the federal government to combat climate change. The legislation is projected to help the United States cut its emissions [40 percent below 2005 levels](#) by the end of this decade.

Still, that law alone won’t be enough to eliminate U.S. emissions by 2050, the target that climate scientists say nations must reach if the world is to avoid the most catastrophic and deadly effects of climate change.

To help close the gap, White House officials have vowed additional policies, such as new regulations on tailpipe emissions, but they have also said that individual states must take further action.

Experts said the new California rule, given its potential reach, could stand alongside the law signed by Mr. Biden last week as one of the world’s most important climate change policies.

In California, the new rule will cut greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles by more than 50 percent in 2040 from the levels that were expected without the policy, according to state regulators. That amounts to eliminating 395 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over that time period, or the equivalent of burning 915 million barrels of oil, said Liane Randolph, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board.

That effect could potentially also spread to 16 other states, big and small. That’s because those states have traditionally followed California’s lead.

California will now send its final rule to the Environmental Protection Agency to request the waiver, which the Biden administration has signaled that it is likely to grant. A spokesman for the agency didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Because of the way the waiver works, California must first get approval from the E.P.A. for its own rules before other states can enforce similar restrictions, Ms. Oge said. A few states — including New York, Washington and Massachusetts — already had similar legislation in the works, and many of the other states that follow California’s lead are expected to consider similar rules over the next year or so.

The governments of Canada, Britain and at least nine other European countries — including France, Spain and Denmark — have set goals of phasing out the sale of new gasoline-powered vehicles between 2030 and 2040. But none have concrete mandates or regulations like the California rule.

“This regulation will set the global high-water mark for the accelerated transition to electric vehicles,” said Drew Kodjak, executive director of the International Council on Clean Transportation, a research organization.

In Washington, Mr. Biden last year signed an executive order calling for the government to try to ensure that [half of all vehicles](#) sold in the United States be electric by 2030, up from 6 percent today, although the order has no binding legal force.

Mr. Biden has also sought to enact federal policies that would further scale up the nation’s use of electric vehicles. The recent climate bill includes \$7,500 in rebates for people who purchase new electric vehicles, although automakers [will have to assemble their vehicles in North America](#) and source their batteries from friendly countries to qualify for the full credit. California officials said that provision would combine with

\$10 billion in a state program to make automobiles more affordable and build charging stations and other electric-vehicle infrastructure, particularly in low-income communities.

Several automakers said their strategies were aligned with California's goal of promoting emission-free vehicles.

General Motors said it was still reviewing the rule but that the company also had a goal of selling only electric vehicles by 2035. "General Motors and California have a shared vision of an all-electric future," said Elizabeth Winter, a spokeswoman for G.M.

Ford's chief sustainability officer, Bob Holycross, said the company planned to invest more than \$50 billion in electric vehicles and batteries by 2026 and said the rule would "set an example for the United States." A spokesman for Stellantis, which owns Chrysler, Fiat, Dodge and other brands, said the company intended to introduce 25 new electric models by 2030 to help support California's goals.

In a statement, Honda called California's rule "an ambitious but important milestone" but cautioned that reaching the goal would require several steps, including building out domestic supply chains so that more vehicles could qualify for the federal tax credit.

Toyota, one of the world's largest automakers, didn't comment on California's new rule but this week said in a statement that it acknowledged California's "leadership in climate policies and its authority to set vehicle emissions standards under the Clean Air Act." During the Trump administration, Toyota had sued to block California from setting stricter rules than the federal government.

To enforce its rule, Ms. Randolph said California would fine automakers up to \$20,000 for every car that falls short of production targets. The state also could propose new amendments revising the sales targets if the market doesn't react as state leaders hope, said Jennifer Gress, who leads the California air board's sustainable transportation division.

State officials say about 16 percent of cars sold in California today are electric, up from 12.4 percent last year.

"We recognize that not everyone is going to be buying a very expensive, brand-new car," Ms. Randolph said. "But we also know that prices will go down in the future."

Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency restored and slightly strengthened an Obama-era fuel economy rule that had been set aside by the Trump administration. It requires passenger vehicles to get 55 miles per gallon by 2026, from just under 40 miles per gallon today.

That national regulation is much less ambitious than California's new rule, but it was the Biden administration that allowed California to press forward with its ambitious policy: It restored California's waiver under the Clean Air Act, which former President Donald J. Trump had halted.

The waiver dates from 1970, when Los Angeles was choking with smog and Congress was enacting the landmark Clean Air Act. California was allowed to set tougher emissions standards than the federal government, but had to provide a compelling reason to be granted a waiver. In 1977, other states were allowed to adopt California's stricter standards.

The Biden administration's reinstatement of the waiver is what enabled California to move forward with its new rule this week. Once in place, California's regulations are expected to influence a new federal standard that the E.P.A. expects to introduce next year, further encouraging automakers to build and sell more electric vehicles.

There is already fierce legal pushback against those plans.

	<p>The attorneys general of 17 Republican-led states have sued to revoke the California waiver, which would undo the state's new policy. Patrick Morrisey, the attorney general of West Virginia and one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, called California's waiver "favoritism" that "violates the states' equal sovereignty."</p> <p>The lawsuit, which will be heard before the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, considered the nation's second most powerful bench after the Supreme Court. Oral arguments have not yet been scheduled.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Ukraine celebrates a nation 'reborn'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/world/europe/ukraine-war-independence-day.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Under the blare of air raid sirens, Ukrainians celebrated their Independence Day with a show of defiance against Russia's invasion on Wednesday, despite the uncertain course of a war that has lasted half a year and brought horror to nearly every part of the country.</p> <p>In Kyiv, mass gatherings were banned, drones flew a Ukrainian flag above the city and a concert was recorded for the holiday in a bomb shelter, reflecting fears that Russia would launch dramatic strikes on civilian centers to spoil the occasion, which commemorates Ukraine's 1991 separation from the Soviet Union.</p> <p>The biggest strike came not in Kyiv but in a small town in eastern Ukraine, where a rail station was hit with a missile strike that crushed passenger cars and set them afire. A least 22 civilians were killed, and 50 were wounded, with the toll expected to rise.</p> <p>"This is how we live every day," President Volodymyr Zelensky said after the attack.</p> <p>But in Kyiv, Ukrainian leaders delivered speeches aimed at rallying foreign backers as much as their citizens at home and the tens of thousands of soldiers huddled in trenches and towns at the front.</p> <p>In a slickly produced address, prerecorded for security reasons, Mr. Zelensky stood before a column of burned and wrecked Russian tanks on a central avenue in the capital and declared Ukraine a nation "reborn" in conflict. Ukraine, he said, has a renewed sense of cultural and political identity that is now wholly separate from Russia.</p> <p>"Every new day is a new reason not to give up," Mr. Zelensky said. "Because, having gone through so much, we have no right not to reach the end. What is the end of the war for us? We used to say, 'Peace.' Now we say, 'Victory.'"</p> <p>But victory — or even a pause to the fighting — appears to be a distant prospect for either Ukraine or Russia. As Europe prepares for a hard winter of high energy prices, driven in part by E.U. sanctions and Russian cuts to the gas supply, Ukrainian officials are under growing pressure to show their European supporters that they can retake territory and turn the war in their favor.</p> <p>European nations that promised weapons, equipment and ammunition have mostly delivered those supplies to Ukraine. But new aid commitments, of gear or cash, dramatically slowed over the summer as countries tallied their stores and tried to deal with problems like inflation.</p> <p>The Biden administration announced on Wednesday that it was sending nearly \$3 billion in weapons and equipment previously approved by Congress, the United States' single largest package of military aid to Ukraine's forces. The outgoing prime minister of Britain, Boris Johnson, met with Mr. Zelensky in Kyiv on Wednesday, saying his country would "continue to stand with our Ukrainian friends."</p> <p>But although Ukraine's Western backers have committed billions in aid to the country, Mr. Zelensky on Wednesday chastised them, as he has periodically, for wavering over new deliveries. "Being indifferent,</p>

inactive and slow is a shame,” he said. Speaking by video to the United Nations Security Council, he urged its members to hold Russia accountable for its invasion.

“In order to build the future, it is necessary to leave in the dustbin of history what has always prevented humanity from living in peace,” he said. “Namely, the aggression and colonial ambitions that Russia came with to Ukraine.”

Ukraine has used Western-supplied weapons to disrupt Russian supply lines, U.S. officials said, describing a slowdown in Russian shelling. But the front lines have shifted only in tiny increments over the past several weeks, and Russia has reinforced its positions in the south to defend against Ukrainian attacks.

Ukrainian officials have said their strategy involves both overt military strikes and covert activities designed to sow chaos. In Crimea, the peninsula seized by Russia in 2014, Ukrainian forces and partisan fighters have been responsible for explosions at ammunition depots and airfields, according to a senior Ukrainian official.

Russia, although it retains an advantage in weapons and controls about 20 percent of Ukrainian territory, has struggled to make more advances.

Both countries face serious manpower problems.

The commander of the Ukrainian Army, Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, acknowledged earlier this week that about 9,000 soldiers had died so far in the war, but on Wednesday he struck a defiant tone.

“What does independence feel like?” General Zaluzhnyi said on Facebook. “Those who are fighting for it know its taste. It’s the taste of earth eating into your skin. The taste of blood and death that saturates the air. The salty taste of tears.”

Western analysts believe Russia may have lost about 20,000 soldiers, but the Kremlin has kept its casualty figures a tightly guarded secret. It has also stifled criticism inside Russia about the war.

On Wednesday, police officers in masks and camouflage stormed the home of Yevgeny Roizman, a popular former mayor of Yekaterinburg and perhaps the most vocal antiwar critic still in Russia. He was detained for “discrediting” the Russian Army, the authorities said, and faces three years in prison under a censorship law signed by President Vladimir V. Putin in March.

“I say this everywhere and will say it now,” Mr. Roizman told reporters outside his apartment. Referring to his own arrest, he said: “We know all there is to know about our country. This is nothing new.”

Russian state news media did not carry any prominent mention that the “special military operation,” as it calls the war, has now gone on for six months. Russia’s defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, said that Moscow intended to slow its military campaign in Ukraine to reduce civilian casualties.

“We are doing this deliberately,” he said, although Moscow has failed to honor previous pledges to protect civilians or ease its assault.

And by evening, two missiles had struck the rail station in Chaplyne in eastern Ukraine; cluster munitions were used in the Kharkiv region in northeastern Ukraine, wounding two civilians; and missiles hit near the central Ukrainian town of Poltava, officials said.

But the strikes were in keeping with Russian long-range fire into Ukraine in recent weeks and not the intensification that the country had braced for. Curfews were in effect in many cities and towns, including some in the eastern Donbas region, where wilted sunflower fields, debris-covered highways and the distant thud of artillery serve as the gates to the war’s front line.

For some residents of the region, where Russian troops have made slow, small gains in recent weeks, Wednesday was just another day on the calendar.

“It’s been the same continuous shelling for weeks here, especially at nights,” said a man named Antolii, who declined to give his last name. His town, Paraskoviivka, has been without water for a month and without electricity for two weeks. It is roughly five miles away from Russian positions.

Nina Fedorivna, a woman in a nearby town, said plainly: “We have constant shelling going on here, round-the-clock, so it won’t be anything new if we’re shelled on Independence Day.”

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HEADLINE	08/24 Jury holds LA Sheriff Dept, FD accountable
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/us/vanessa-bryant-verdict-crash-photos.html
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — A jury awarded Vanessa Bryant \$16 million on Wednesday in her lawsuit against Los Angeles County over the inappropriate sharing of photos of human remains from the helicopter crash that killed her husband, Kobe Bryant, and her daughter, Gianna, along with seven others.</p> <p>Chris Chester, whose wife Sarah, 45, and daughter, Payton, 13 were among those killed in the crash and who joined the suit, was awarded \$15 million.</p> <p>Ms. Bryant, who wore a face mask in court, clasped her hands around her head and began to weep as the verdict was read.</p> <p>Mr. Chester looked straight ahead.</p> <p>Jerry Jackson, Mr. Chester’s lawyer, said he and the plaintiffs were grateful to the jury and Judge John F. Walter, “who gave us a very fair trial.”</p> <p>Ms. Bryant and her lawyers declined to comment after the verdict was read on Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>Mira Hashmall, the lead attorney for the county in the case, said in a statement that she and other members of the county’s legal team disagreed with the verdict.</p> <p>“We will be discussing next steps with our client,” she said. “Meanwhile, we hope the Bryant and Chester families continue to heal from their tragic loss.”</p> <p>Mr. Bryant, a star for the Los Angeles Lakers, achieved a stature in Southern California that far transcended basketball. On Wednesday, about 14 blocks from the courthouse, a new mural celebrating his legacy was unveiled to mark “Mamba Day,” referring to Mr. Bryant’s nickname.</p> <p>The jury’s decision, which ended a federal civil trial that lasted nearly two weeks, was an uncommonly high-profile rebuke of two colossal and insular agencies — the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and the Los Angeles County Fire Department — that wield enormous power in the nation’s second biggest metropolis.</p> <p>On a foggy Sunday morning in January 2020, Mr. Bryant, 41, and eight others were flying from Orange County to a youth basketball tournament in a suburb north of Los Angeles when the pilot became disoriented in the clouds. The helicopter crashed into a hill near Calabasas, Calif., and everyone on board was killed.</p> <p>As news of the crash and the identity of the victims rippled around the world, law enforcement officials, investigators, journalists and fans of Mr. Bryant headed toward the rugged crash scene.</p> <p>In those first hours after the crash, Ms. Bryant alleged in her lawsuit, Los Angeles County firefighters and sheriff’s deputies were allowed to take unnecessary close-up photos of human remains around the</p>

site, including the bodies of Kobe and Gianna Bryant, and the photos were then shared among sheriff's deputies and firefighters.

Ms. Bryant testified in court that a few days after the emotional public memorial for her husband of almost two decades, she was told about [a Los Angeles Times report](#) that one of the deputies, Joey Cruz, had shown photos to a bartender and another bar patron, who filed a complaint with the Sheriff's Department.

"I felt like I wanted to run down the block and just scream," Ms. Bryant testified. "But I couldn't escape. I can't escape my body."

Another woman, a relative of some of the crash victims, testified that a Fire Department official showed some of the photos at a gala where communications staff were receiving an award. She later complained to the Fire Department.

In the suit, Ms. Bryant accused the county of negligence and of violating her constitutional right to privacy. Her lawyers argued that orders from Fire Department and Sheriff's Department officials to delete the images after inquiries were begun amounted to the destruction of evidence and an attempted cover-up.

Ms. Bryant and Mr. Chester sought damages for emotional distress brought on by worrying that the photos could surface publicly on the internet at any time.

Lawyers for the county acknowledged that the photos were taken and were shared, but they argued that the effort to delete them was thorough enough to keep the photos from appearing for the last two and a half years, and therefore the photos had not been publicly disseminated. The photos were not introduced as evidence in the trial.

"To claim privacy and then put all these details in public — it defies logic," Ms. Hashmall said.

The county's lawyers argued that although some county policies were violated, the plaintiffs' constitutional rights were not. And they said that police officers, firefighters and other emergency responders need the flexibility to document accident scenes before federal investigators or coroner's officials arrive, so the taking of the photographs was justified.

The trial was in some ways a typical Los Angeles celebrity legal spectacle. Ms. Bryant arrived each day at the gleaming, cube-shaped federal courthouse in downtown Los Angeles in a black sport utility vehicle and walked briskly past photographers as she entered and left the building.

Rob Pelinka, the general manager of the Los Angeles Lakers, testified in the trial, and several of Ms. Bryant's friends, including the professional soccer player Sydney Leroux and the singer Ciara, appeared in the gallery to support her.

The suit was an effort to hold officials to account for behavior that lawyers for Ms. Bryant and Mr. Chester argued had "shocked the conscience."

Throughout the trial, the plaintiffs' lawyers portrayed sheriff's deputies and firefighters as motivated by a kind of macabre voyeurism that they said was embedded in the agencies' culture.

They played video of Sheriff Alex Villanueva talking about how, "since the invention of the Polaroid," law enforcement officers have been creating so-called death books, documenting the bodies they'd seen in the course of their work.

The agencies had no explicit policies in force that would bar officers from making images of human remains, so the practice was allowed to continue essentially unchecked until citizens spoke up.

The agencies' internal efforts to investigate what had happened in the Bryant case were sloppy and incomplete, the plaintiffs' lawyers argued.

Mr. Villanueva, who took the witness stand just after Ms. Bryant, testified that he had offered "amnesty" to deputies for coming forward with the images and then deleting them.

In closing arguments, Craig Lavoie, who represented Ms. Bryant, showed the jury a flow chart of how the photos had spread. There were question marks on the chart for people who, according to witness testimony or official reports, had received the images but whose electronic devices were never searched.

"If I asked all nine of you to give a percentage chance these photos would end up online, I'd get nine different answers," Mr. Lavoie told the jury. "But none of them would be zero. And when it's your husband, your child, you don't get the luxury of cold percentages."

Jerry Jackson, Mr. Chester's lawyer, asked the jury to consider awarding a total of as much as \$75 million to the plaintiffs — \$2.5 million each for past suffering, plus about \$1 million for each year of their remaining life expectancy — a formula that would add up to \$30 million for Mr. Chester and \$40 million for Ms. Bryant.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you can't award too much for what they've been through," Mr. Jackson told the jury.

He asked the jury to divide the burden of paying the damages evenly between the Sheriff's and Fire Departments; both are funded by Los Angeles County taxpayers.

In their closing arguments, lawyers for the county said that ultimately, the case was about photographs that almost no one had seen.

"This is a photographs case but there are no photographs," Ms. Hashmall said.

The jury disagreed, finding that the failure of both agencies to train employees about the right to privacy amounted to a constitutional violation. They also found that the Sheriff's Department's practice of taking and sharing photos of human remains violated Ms. Bryant's and Mr. Chester's constitutional rights.

They deliberated for less than five hours.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Tacoma: freight train derails, 3rd this year
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article264866424.html
GIST	<p>For the third time in a year, a freight train passing near the Port of Tacoma derailed, knocking down power lines and blocking traffic in the surrounding area Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>The incident was first reported to the Tacoma Fire Department a few minutes before 2 p.m., according to department spokesperson Sionna Stallings-Alailima. It caused multiple cars of the train, operated by BNSF Railway, to derail near the intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Port of Tacoma Road. No one was injured, according to Stallings-Alailima.</p> <p>Nearby power lines draped over some of the train cars. A BNSF employee at the scene did not respond to questions from The News Tribune but did say the area was unsafe for civilians.</p> <p>The incident disrupted traffic around the Port of Tacoma. At 2:30 p.m. the wrecked train was stalled in the 2300 block of Lincoln Avenue, preventing vehicles from passing through. At that time, Stallings-Alailima did not know how much longer the road would be blocked.</p>

Return to Top	<p>It is the third time in 12 months a freight train has derailed near the intersection, with prior incidents coming in September 2021 and March 2022. BNSF has not yet made the cause of Wednesday's wreck public.</p> <p>In a statement emailed to the newspaper, a BNSF spokesperson wrote that the two cars that derailed were empty containers. She said the crew members were working to re-rail them.</p> <p>Eric Green, a manager with Tacoma Public Utilities, told the newspaper he expects the power to be out along Port of Tacoma Rd. until around 5 p.m. He said the area surrounding Lincoln Ave. could be out until Thursday.</p> <p>Some workers at the Port of Tacoma have come to expect BNSF train derailments near this intersection. Robert Ross, a longshoreman, told The News Tribune he and his crew have seen events like this periodically.</p> <p>"[Trains] keep shoving, just keep shoving this way and starts destroying the surrounding infrastructure," Ross said.</p> <p>He noted the disruption that an event like this wreck causes to the workers who use the Port regularly.</p> <p>"This is a vital corridor for the economy," he said. "When the Port of Tacoma is cut off like this, no more cargo is flowing. The freeway's right here ... so from here down, nobody's getting cargo."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Loan relief: up to 500,000 in WA to benefit
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/a-half-million-wa-residents-could-benefit-from-bidens-student-loan-relief/
GIST	<p>In the fall of 2010, Anthony D'Amico was an undergraduate student studying abroad when he explained to German students that he'd have to take out thousands of dollars in debt if he went to law school.</p> <p>"I remember two people being really shocked," D'Amico said. "Like almost laughing at the absurdity of it."</p> <p>Twelve years later, D'Amico has about \$46,000 in federal student loan debt. It's not from law school — in 2021, he got his master's degree from the University of Washington and now teaches history at Lincoln High School in Seattle.</p> <p>On Wednesday, D'Amico learned that President Joe Biden is canceling up to \$20,000 of federal student loan debt for Pell Grant recipients, and \$10,000 for all others, if they make \$125,000 or less a year. The move fulfills a campaign promise and could affect hundreds of thousands of recent Washington college graduates who took out loans to go to school.</p> <p>It's good news for D'Amico, 34, because it chips away at his monthly student loan payments. But he still has a lot more to pay and was disappointed to see Biden stop at just \$10,000.</p> <p>Biden's student loan relief plan erases the debt of roughly 20 million people across the country. His reforms also target those who struggle the most with student debt: recipients of Pell Grants — federal grants awarded to students who have exceptional financial need — and community college graduates.</p> <p>In Washington state, 47% of all college graduates in 2020 had student loan debt, the average being \$23,900, according to The Institute for College Access and Success, a nonprofit.</p> <p>Residents in Washington tend to borrow less to pay for college than those in other states. That's because of the lower cost to attend its public universities, as well as its generous financial aid, which gives a full ride to thousands of low- to middle-income students.</p>

Public universities, which are cheaper to attend than private universities, also tend to be very popular among Washington residents, said Michael Meotti, the executive director of the Washington Student Achievement Council, a state agency that sets policy and distributes financial aid.

But Biden's announcement will still affect a significant number of college graduates across the state. "If we were to sort of ballpark it, as many as 400,000 to 500,000 Washington residents will get a benefit from it," Meotti said.

The largest benefit — erasing \$20,000 in federal student loans for Pell Grant recipients — will have the biggest impact on students of color, who are more likely to qualify for those loans.

"It's likely to be a step in the right direction of racial equity and a step in the right direction of closing the racial wealth divide," Sameer Gadkaree, executive director of The Institute for College Access and Success, told The Seattle Times.

For Tiana Tinson, who received a Pell Grant while studying at UW, Biden's plan will clear the \$11,000 in student loans she took out while pursuing her bachelor's degree. However, she's about halfway through a graduate degree at UW and anticipates sinking into another \$50,000 in debt.

While Tinson appreciates the added relief for Pell Grant recipients, she said she wanted to see more student debt canceled in Biden's plan. She also wanted to see actual reform: lowering the cost of attending universities.

"It seems like the current administration is at least trying to work hard," Tinson said. "I think we still have a long way to go and reform is necessary."

In-state undergraduate tuition at UW this year is \$11,189. When books, living expenses and other fees are added together, the university estimates the total cost at more than \$32,000 for a year of undergraduate education.

A.J. Balatico, a UW graduate student and the president of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, said that while the amount may be life-changing for those who have less than \$20,000 in student debt, many graduate students at UW owe far more.

"I think it's a Band-Aid to the larger problems of, 'Why is higher education expensive? Why is tuition the way that it is?'" he said.

Michael Marquez, 32, who graduated from Spokane Falls Community College and will attend Eastern Washington University this fall, saw Biden's plan as a great first step toward student debt reform.

"Just because people in the past couldn't or maybe even could afford school, that doesn't mean that people in the future should be saddled with debt because the system promised them if they got educated, they can get a good job," Marquez said.

It will sweep away about \$2,300 in student loans he took out to attend Spokane Falls Community College. He started attending the college full time in September and worked there part time. Federal student loans helped him cover tuition, allowing him to focus on school.

Not too long ago, it wasn't like that for him. In 2019, Marquez was living with his family in Chicago and worked 40 hours a week, which helped him pay to attend South Suburban Community College full time. Marquez said it was a difficult balancing act.

"I would hope that nobody ever has to do that because you don't have time to participate in college life," Marquez said. "You don't have time to make friends in school."

Marquez moved to Spokane because he'd pay less in community college tuition and would also save more money on other recurring expenses, from rent to gas, compared with Chicago. He worked a part-time job on campus and took out a small student loan.

Marquez is happy that his community college student loans will be canceled. He's also happy about other loan adjustments in Biden's reform measure, which will make student loans less onerous and easier to pay back.

To Marquez, that means less pressure to immediately find a lucrative job after graduating in order to afford monthly student loan payments. Instead, he can focus on his career goals. "It really gives me way more opportunity," Marquez said.

For nursing school student Elissa Pennebaker, the reform measures could free up money to help pay off a car loan or install new gutters on her home.

Pennebaker decided to get her associate degree in nursing from Spokane Community College five years ago, and she knew as a single mother in her late 30s, she would be a "nontraditional student."

Pennebaker said she had just moved from Japan and gone through a divorce. School was a way to gain "control of my universe," she said.

Currently, Pennebaker, a 41 year-old Spokane resident, is studying to get her bachelors from Washington State University while working as a nurse, and intends to eventually get a doctorate to become a nurse practitioner in women's health.

While her bachelor's degree will be completely paid for through Pell Grants, her associate degree put her \$12,000 in debt. Her doctorate will cost \$70,000, she said.

Pennebaker said she lives on a "shoestring budget" and took full advantage of food stamps and Medicaid while in school.

Debt forgiveness will help people choose more fulfilling jobs, she said, and hopefully can help address the shortage of nurses.

"A lot of countries have free college or programs to help pay for college a little bit better, I can't believe that we don't value higher education," she said.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Kent teachers on strike; school delay
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education/lab/first-day-of-school-for-kent-students-delayed-as-educators-strike/
GIST	<p>The first day of classes for Kent Public Schools students will be delayed because educators are going on strike, district officials announced Wednesday evening.</p> <p>Students were supposed to start the new school year on Thursday, one of the earliest start dates in the Seattle area, but the district and teachers' union could not come to an agreement on a contract. Kent Education Association (KEA) members voted Monday night to strike if negotiations weren't wrapped up by Wednesday.</p> <p>"We are deeply committed to recruiting and retaining a high-quality workforce that serves to equip every student to be globally competitive in college, careers, and in life," district officials said in a statement.</p> <p>"We remain in negotiations with the KEA and remain committed to reaching an agreement and starting school as soon as possible."</p>

	<p>The union is negotiating for more pay. It says its teachers need raises to stay competitive, and that they want manageable class sizes and more mental health support for students. KEA is also negotiating for what they describe as a manageable case load for staff working with English learners and students in special education.</p> <p>Teachers and staff planned to show up at their schools on Thursday morning with picket signs.</p> <p>Kent is one of the largest school districts in the greater Seattle area, with an enrollment of about 24,000 students last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 More heat on way but fall just 29 days away
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/more-heat-is-in-store-for-seattle-area-but-fall-is-just-29-days-away/
GIST	<p>If you're a hot-weather-fearing aestophobe — which might not be in the dictionary, but it is in the lexicon for some heat haters — hold on! We've got some more serious heat this week, yes, but the sweet relief of the autumn equinox is less than a month away.</p> <p>You might say that's overly dramatic. You like the sun! I'm being all negative when I say we'll eventually get rain! You've lived places a lot hotter!</p> <p>Daytime temperatures are expected to be in the upper 80s or low to mid-90s in the Seattle area Thursday, according to the National Weather Service of Seattle.</p> <p>If you love the heat, have air conditioning or are on a boat living your best life, then enjoy the next couple days.</p> <p>This story is not for you.</p> <p>If, however, you are among the irritable and crabby masses sleeping in front of fans, perhaps an aestophobe, one who fears hot weather, be consoled.</p> <p>At least a few days of significantly cooler weather — with highs in the mid- to upper 70s and even a chance of rain — are expected on Friday and over the weekend, according to weather service meteorologist Kirby Cook.</p> <p>More important, the autumnal equinox will occur on Thursday, Sept. 22, at 6:03 p.m.</p> <p>With the equinox comes rapidly diminishing chances for more 90-degree “miserable, can't-sleep heat,” according to Justin Shaw of Seattle Weather Blog. The latest recorded 90-plus-degree day in Seattle occurred on Sept. 22, 1990, when it hit 92 degrees, Shaw said.</p> <p>Like many Puget Sound residents, Shaw does not enjoy the extra hot days. He had almost dared to hope we'd get one of those increasingly rare summers that never gets hot. It was looking promising during that long, cold spring in April, May and June, and we are, after all, in our third La Niña year.</p> <p>But then we went from gloomy and dark in mid-July to a heat wave — with highs in the mid-90s — at the end of July. The excessive-heat warning for the Seattle area from the National Weather Service was originally set for two days, but then was extended day after day, until by the end we'd had six record-breaking 90-degree (or above) days in a row.</p> <p>And since then — less than 30 days later — we've seen several slightly lesser heat waves of two or three days. It has been like having a whole summer of hot days jammed into one month, Shaw said.</p> <p>“It's been such a compressed timeline,” Shaw said. “I think most of Seattle is looking forward to fall.”</p>

HEADLINE	08/24 WA ferries face increasingly more delays
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/wa-ferry-delays-hit-highest-mark-in-past-decade/
GIST	<p>Washington ferries are running behind schedule this year more than they have in the past decade, with a consistent decline in on-time performance, according to an analysis of Washington State Ferries data.</p> <p>Every summer, with 50% more passengers traveling by ferry, it is not unusual to see a dip in on-time performance from June to September, said spokesperson Ian Sterling.</p> <p>“The higher volume of passengers inevitably affects the time taken to get everyone on board and ultimately the on-time performance,” he said, adding that this time of year often attracts first-time ferry travelers, including out-of-state visitors.</p> <p>The delays are more pronounced this year, however, and passengers on the Anacortes/San Juans route are particularly feeling it, according to WSF data.</p> <p>While this route usually records more delays than others, in June, nearly half of all sailings on this route ran behind schedule. This is a 40 percentage-point gap from WSF’s target to run on time for 95% of trips.</p> <p>WSF attributes the lower on-time performance to a staffing shortage and a higher number of passengers on busy routes.</p> <p>By and large, the timing of these delays is similar to traffic congestion on roads to and from Seattle. Like freeway rush hour, ferry passengers will face greater delays in the mornings and evenings, Sterling said.</p> <p>On weekends, especially holiday weekends like Labor Day, passengers on popular tourist routes such as Anacortes/San Juans and Port Townsend/Coupeville are more likely to face delays on Thursday and Friday afternoon leaving the Seattle area and returning on Sunday and Monday afternoon.</p> <p>An aging workforce</p> <p>As of July this year, WSF had a 6% decline in staffing since 2019, when it was running at full capacity. There is a shortage of more than 100 people in the agency.</p> <p>Hires in the last month have brought the gap down to 4%. Still, it will be some time before the new hires are fully trained to help plug staffing shortages.</p> <p>“This isn’t a job you just do walking off the street,” Sterling said. That means a “sizable portion” of existing staff is training new hires, which affects how many people are available to run ferry services.</p> <p>Currently WSF’s biggest staffing shortage is in the engine room — the department has 45 fewer engineers — a decline of over 10% from 2019, when it was operating at full capacity.</p> <p>While there were several departures in November after Gov. Jay Inslee’s COVID-19 vaccination mandate, the current shortage is due to retirements and the 10 to 12 fleet personnel out each day due to active COVID cases, according to Sterling.</p> <p>WSF’s slow replacement of its aging staff also extends to the deck crew, which is needed to run sailings. Since 2017, 66 captains and 24 mates have left WSF. Over 80% were retirements. As of August, WSF is staffed with 74 captains and 101 mates.</p> <p>Route and vessel considerations, for both engine employees and deck officers, is also a factor, according to Sterling. Captains can’t sail every route in the system as they have to get certified by routes. Similarly, engine staff are assigned to specific boats or classes of boats and also can’t move between vessels in most circumstances.</p>

“We could be overstaffed on specific routes or boats, but still short on others and aren’t able to move staff easily due to qualifications required,” he said.

A thinning fleet

In the next year, WSF’s waning fleet size will further complicate service woes.

The 21 vessels WSF currently has on hand is the smallest fleet size in the past decade. After a decline in the average time a vessel is out for maintenance in 2020, the time out of service is trending upward again.

It takes 19 vessels to run full summer service and the two other vessels on hand play a key role when a ship is taken out of rotation for Coast Guard inspections and maintenance, like the Cathlamet ferry, which [crashed near the Fauntleroy dock in West Seattle](#) last month.

“This doesn’t leave enough vessels on the bench, so there are no spares,” Sterling said, adding that soon some of these vessels will be up for midlife upgrades.

Skipping upgrades is not really an option, he said. It will inevitably affect WSF’s ability to run full service as it did pre-pandemic.

For now, as long as no other vessel is taken out, it has vessels ready to deploy.

“They’re just sitting there, because we don’t have the manpower yet,” Sterling said.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Pakistan floods: 903 dead since mid-June
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/floods-wreak-havoc-across-pakistan-903-dead-since-mid-june/
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD (AP) — Heavy rains have triggered flash floods and wreaked havoc across much of Pakistan since mid-June, leaving 903 dead and about 50,000 people homeless, the country’s disaster agency said Wednesday.</p> <p>Thousands whose homes were swept away now live in tents, miles away from their inundated villages and towns, after being rescued by soldiers, local disaster workers and volunteers.</p> <p>The National Disaster Management Authority said Wednesday that 126 people were killed in flood-related incidents in the past 48 hours, with most of the victims being women and children.</p> <p>The flooding has further exacerbated Pakistan’s economic crisis. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif issued an appeal Wednesday from abroad, urging philanthropists to help flood-affected areas in Pakistan.</p> <p>Sharif is currently in the Gulf Arab state of Qatar, where he arrived on Tuesday, seeking financial assistance, loans and foreign investment for his cash-strapped Islamic nation. His government has promised to compensate those who lost homes in the floods.</p> <p>After talks on Wednesday with Qatar’s emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Sharif announced that the Qatari Investment Authority is prepared to invest \$3 billion in Pakistan. The trip is Sharif’s first official visit to Qatar as prime minister since he replaced Imran Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence in Parliament in April.</p> <p>After inundating much of southwestern Baluchistan and eastern Punjab province, flash floods have now started to affect also the southern Sindh province. Authorities this week closed schools in Sindh and Baluchistan.</p> <p>Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s minister of climate change, tweeted on Tuesday that local authorities are unable to cope on their own and appealed on the world community to help.</p>

Pakistani Television footage on Wednesday showed people wading through waist-high water, holding their children and carrying essential items on their heads. Rescuers used trucks and boats to evacuate people to safer places and food, tents and other basic supplies were being dispatched to flood-affected areas.

In some places, the popular Geo TV reported, families struggled to bury their loved ones as local graveyards were also inundated by floodwaters. The TV broadcast footage showing mourners carrying coffins through flooded areas to bury the dead away from submerged homes.

Monsoon rains, which started in mid-June, were expected to continue this week, mainly in the south.

Murad Ali Shah, the top elected official in Sindh province, said the situation was worse than in 2010, when floods killed at least 1,700 people in Pakistan, mostly in Sindh. “We are doing our best to evacuate people from flood-hit areas,” he said Tuesday.

Floods have damaged as many as 129 bridges across Pakistan, disrupting the supply of fruit and vegetables to markets and causing a hike in prices.

Experts say climate change has caused erratic weather conditions in Pakistan, resulting in cloudbursts, and melting of glaciers that has swelled rivers. They say that limiting planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions will help limit more drastic weather events around the world, including in this South Asian country.

“In recent decades, we never witnessed such an unusual heavier downpour in Pakistan,” said scientist Shahla Gondal, adding that authorities are ill-equipped and “do not know how to tackle” flooding disasters.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Snohomish Co. faces spike in overdoses
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/fentanyl-overdoses-snohomish-county/281-eb45c07d-f50d-4563-bedb-75f2720b4e19
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Snohomish County has seen a spike in overdoses and overdose-related deaths this year.</p> <p>According to the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office (SCSO), between July 26 and Aug. 8, emergency medical crews and law enforcement officers responded to 40 known or suspected overdose incidents involving illegal or prescription drugs. That is compared to 10 overdoses during the rest of July.</p> <p>At least 67 overdose-related deaths occurred over the first four months of 2022, according to medical examiner reports.</p> <p>Blue counterfeit oxycodone pills containing fentanyl are most common, but the Drug Task Force and law enforcement have seen an increase of fentanyl in powder or crystal form over the past several months along with multi-color counterfeit pills, according to the SCSO.</p> <p>The second most prevalent drug is methamphetamine, which is often combined with fentanyl.</p> <p>Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report that showed 107,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2021. It marked a 15% increase from the previous record, set in 2020.</p> <p>According to the CDC, signs of an overdose include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small, constricted pupils• Falling asleep or losing consciousness• Slow, weak or no breathing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choking or gurgling sounds • Limp body • Cold or clammy skin • Discolored skin (especially in lips and nails) <p>The CDC suggests anyone who thinks someone is overdosing should call 911 immediately, administer naloxone if available and stay with the person until help arrives. In Washington, anyone who calls for medical help during an overdose can't face drug possession charges under the state's good Samaritan law.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Non-profit buys, gives RVs to homeless
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/nonprofit-rvs-homeless-donations/281-73bc8404-f9ea-4242-995c-13f918d23182
GIST	<p>GRANITE FALLS, Wash. — The search for a solution to our region's homeless problem is a difficult one, but a unique program in Snohomish County appears to be helping.</p> <p>It involves buying RVs for people who are experiencing homelessness and making them actual homeowners.</p> <p>The idea of giving mobile homes to people who are homeless can elicit images of derelict campers on the sides of neighborhood streets, but a Snohomish County nonprofit is proving that doesn't have to be the case.</p> <p>Kristi Hamilton's new home is a used, 270-square-foot RV, complete with all the amenities most of us take for granted, like a bed.</p> <p>"Since I've had this bed it's the best I've slept in a year," said Kristi. "It's Heaven."</p> <p>For the past year, Kristi had been sleeping in her van. She used to live in her own Marysville condo, but she lost her job and then debilitating medical conditions took hold, rendering her unable to work.</p> <p>Unable to pay her bills, the condo was soon gone, and Kristi found herself in an entirely different world.</p> <p>"I had people trying to open my van door at night. I had people strung out on drugs yelling and screaming at me," she said. "It was scary."</p> <p>Enter Penelope Protheroe, president of Angel Resource Connection.</p> <p>The nonprofit buys used motor homes and campers, then turns the titles over to people like Kristi, making them instant homeowners.</p> <p>The organization has given homes to 11 individuals and families over the past year and a half. Participants in the program must be fully sober and have some source of reliable income.</p> <p>Angel Resource Connection pays the first and last months rent, then negotiates an affordable rent with a mobile home park which the homeowner will pay, moving forward.</p> <p>"We have very strict rules, but we also have a philosophy of extreme generosity," said Protheroe. "We believe in giving people more than they're expecting, giving them their dignity back."</p> <p>Those looking to sell or donate an RV must have the vehicle in good, clean, running shape.</p> <p>The wait for affordable housing in Snohomish County is three to five years.</p> <p>Kristi and her 16-year-old dog Benji got into their RV in just a matter of days.</p>

	<p>They've been in their humble abode just two weeks - two weeks that have transformed their lives.</p> <p>"What more could you ask for?" said Kristi with Benji at her feet. "I have security. I have a place to call home. I finally have a future."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Up to 4M not working due to long Covid
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/over-2-million-americans-arent-working-due-to-long-covid-says-brookings-11661364528
GIST	<p>Between two million and four million Americans aren't working due to the long-term effects of Covid-19, according to a new Brookings Institution report released Wednesday.</p> <p>The inability to work translates to roughly \$170 billion a year in lost wages, the report estimates. It follows a January Brookings Institution report that estimated long Covid was potentially causing 15% of the country's labor shortage.</p> <p>The report estimates that roughly 16 million Americans of working age—between 18 and 65—have long Covid, which most groups and doctors define as wide-ranging symptoms that persist for months following an infection and can include shortness of breath, extreme fatigue and neurocognitive issues.</p> <p>An estimated 10% to 30% of people with Covid develop the condition, according to studies and estimates from governments, hospitals, universities and doctors. It can occur after even mild cases. Long Covid's impact is being felt on workplaces with employees not well enough to work and patients struggling to financially support themselves, as well as family members having to act as caregivers.</p> <p>"Three million full-time-equivalent workers is 1.8% of the entire U.S. civilian labor force," said Katie Bach, a nonresident senior fellow at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank and author of both Brookings reports.</p> <p>A roughly 1.8% reduction in the U.S. workforce is in line with estimates from other countries. In a May speech a former Bank of England committee member attributed a 1.3% drop in labor-force participation to "long-term sickness," citing long Covid.</p> <p>Ms. Bach said she used data from the U.S. Census Bureau, which recently added four long-Covid questions to its June household survey. She also used a recent Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis study, a survey from the United Kingdom's Trades Union Congress, and a Lancet study from a long Covid advocacy group for the report.</p> <p>David Cutler, a health economist and professor of economics at Harvard University, has also calculated the economic cost of long Covid. According to his estimates, the total cost is \$3.7 trillion. He breaks the costs down to reduced quality of life, reduced earnings and increased medical spending.</p> <p>"So if you say, is it worth it to spend \$50 billion on long Covid...there's almost no amount of money that you could spend that you could feel like is too much money," said Dr. Cutler.</p> <p>Dr. Cutler, who has reviewed Ms. Bach's reports and said they are based on sound calculations, agreed that long Covid is contributing to a labor shortage. The labor force is roughly 600,000 workers smaller than in early 2000 and several million smaller if you adjust for the increase in population, according to Labor Department data.</p> <p>Ms. Bach noted that the number of disabled people in the U.S. has gone up by two million during the pandemic, according to the Census Bureau's current population survey. Yet labor-force participation among the disabled has gone up, which may mean some long Covid patients are working in some capacity remotely.</p>

	<p>David Putrino, director of rehabilitation innovation at Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, said the Brookings report highlights what doctors see at long Covid clinics all the time.</p> <p>“Long Covid definitely affects the ability to remain employed, and we’re definitely seeing a lot of people being denied short- and long-term disability and workers’ compensation despite the fact that they have a diagnosis of long Covid,” said Dr. Putrino.</p> <p>Monica Verduzco-Gutierrez, professor and chair of the department of rehabilitation medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and director of its Covid Recovery Clinic, said a lot of long Covid patients are having difficulties going back to work.</p> <p>“That’s going to cost the economy a lot,” she said. “Study after study shows that a lot of the people who are affected are 40-year-olds, people who are working.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Thailand suspends prime minister; next?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/25/asia/thailand-prayut-chan-ocha-suspended-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has temporarily stepped aside as the country's leader but remains its defense minister, according to a government spokesman.</p> <p>The unusual leadership reshuffle follows a ruling by the Constitutional Court of Thailand on Wednesday, which ordered Prayut to stand aside while it considers if he breached the eight-year term limit recently written into the constitution.</p> <p>Prayut took the role of prime minister after a military coup in 2014 before winning a controversial general election in 2019.</p> <p>In the meantime, he ordered the the kingdom's constitution to be re-written, banning the prime minister from serving more than eight years in office. But the question now is whether Prayut has breached his own limit.</p> <p>Earlier this week the court accepted a petition signed by 172 opposition lawmakers that claims Prayut's rule started in 2014, when he took power in the coup. The court will also likely consider if his term officially began in 2017, when the constitution was rewritten, or even 2019, after the election.</p> <p>Five out of nine constitutional court judges agreed on Wednesday that Prayut should be suspended while the court considers the matter, but didn't provide a timeline for the ruling. The court gave Prayut 15 days to submit a counter statement as to why he should keep the job, once he formally receives the court paper.</p> <p>In a statement, Prayut's office said he respects the court's decision.</p> <p>The order "will not affect the administration of the nation, work carried out by civil servants or the government's ongoing policies," the statement said.</p> <p>Who is in charge now?</p> <p>Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan will step in acting as prime minister while the court mulls its final verdict, government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri told reporters on Wednesday. Prawit himself is former army chief and a longtime supporter of the Thai monarchy.</p> <p>Fresh elections are due by May next year under the constitution, but the sitting prime minister still has the power to call early elections by dissolving the elected House of Representatives.</p> <p>Prayut has survived four no-confidence votes in the past months, and looked set to cling on to power until the elections, said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a professor at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.</p>

But critics say it is time for him to go.

"There have been some economic mismanagement, politics is still polarized, since over the past eight years since he's been prime minister -- or since he's been called as the prime minister -- Thailand has not done well," Thitinan said.

While youth-led protests seem to have died down as of late, he said this was because some of the movement's leaders had [been prosecuted](#) and grievances over the Prayut's government remain.

Why is Prayut unpopular?

Prayut's rule as a military coup leader turned prime minister has been marred with growing authoritarianism and widening inequality.

The former military chief came to power in a bloodless coup in 2014 that overthrew [Yingluck Shinawatra](#)'s scandal-laden government following six months of civil unrest and violent street protests.

But shortly after taking over, Prayut banned all political campaigning including political gatherings of more than five people. During his leadership, hundreds of activists have been arrested and charged under draconian laws such as sedition or the [lese majeste](#) -- which prohibits criticism of the royal family.

In 2020, young people across the country defied threats from the military-backed government to take to the streets and call for Prayut's resignation. The [mass protests](#) stemmed from failed promises to restore democracy, and what activists say is a repression of civil rights and freedoms.

The military government's mismanagement in handling of the [coronavirus pandemic](#) and economy, nepotism and lack of transparency and accountability, also amplified calls for Prayut to step down.

Dissatisfaction over the military government and the kingdom's monarchy continued well into 2021.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who assumed the throne in 2016 and was crowned in May 2019, is believed to spend much of his time overseas and has been largely absent from public life in [Thailand](#) as the country grappled with the coronavirus pandemic.

Since becoming King, billions of dollars worth of assets held by the Thai Crown have been transferred to Vajiralongkorn, asserting his control of royal finances and vastly increasing his personal wealth, which drew ire among the public who are required to revere the monarchy.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Qualify for student loan forgiveness?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/24/politics/biden-student-loan-forgiveness-qualify/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced his plan to address student loan debt, which includes debt forgiveness for certain borrowers and extending the pandemic-related payment pause.</p> <p>The Biden administration has already canceled nearly \$32 billion of the \$1.6 trillion in outstanding federal student debt by expanding existing forgiveness programs for public-sector workers, disabled borrowers and students who were defrauded by for-profit colleges.</p> <p>Here are details CNN has learned of Biden's new plan, including how much will be forgiven and who is eligible.</p> <p>Who qualifies? The plan applies to federal student loan borrowers.</p> <p>How much forgiveness will they get?</p>

The amount of debt canceled depends on whether the borrower received a Pell grant to attend college. A [federal Pell grant](#) is only given to undergraduate students who "display exceptional financial need and have not earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree" and "does not have to be repaid, except under certain circumstances," according to the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office. Per [data cited by the White House](#), Pell grants currently only cover a third of the cost of a four-year public college degree, which has led to increased borrowing.

Individual borrowers who make less than \$125,000 yearly and married couples or heads of households who make less than \$250,000 yearly will have up \$10,000 of their federal student loan debt forgiven if they did not receive a Pell grant as an undergraduate student, per the [FSA website](#).

Individual borrowers who make less than \$125,000 yearly and married couples or heads of households who make less than \$250,000 yearly but did receive a Pell grant as an undergraduate student will have up \$20,000 of their student loan debt forgiven.

What steps do eligible borrowers have to take?

Nearly 8 million borrowers may be able to receive debt forgiveness automatically because the Department of Education already has their income information, FSA says.

The Biden administration will launch an application in the coming weeks for borrowers to provide their income information or if borrowers are unsure if the department has their income information already. FSA says the application will be available before the federal student loan repayment pause ends on December 31.

Borrowers can sign up for updates on when the application is open at the [Department of Education's subscriptions page](#).

How will future repayments for remaining debt work?

Student loan repayment will be paused again until December 31, 2022, with repayments starting in January 2023.

The Biden administration is also proposing a rule to create a new [income-driven repayment plan](#) in which borrowers pay no more than 5% of their monthly income on undergraduate loans, a decrease from the current 10% threshold.

The rule would also increase the amount of income that is considered "non-discretionary income" so no borrower earning below 225% of the federal poverty level will have to make a monthly payment.

For borrowers with loan balances of \$12,000 or less, loan balances would be forgiven after 10 years of payments instead of the current 20-year mark, under the proposed new income-driven repayment plan.

And to help prevent a borrower's loan balance from growing while the individual makes monthly payments, under the proposed rule the Biden administration would cover unpaid monthly interest, even if the monthly payment is \$0 due to the borrower's income level.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Firefighters protective gear cancer risk?
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/firefighter-gear-may-contain-chemicals-linked-cancer-rcna44511
GIST	<p>A firefighters union and a chiefs association are both warning members that the protective gear firefighters wear poses a health risk because it can contain PFAS, synthetic chemicals associated with issues such as an increased risk of liver and kidney cancer.</p> <p>PFAS, short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are often referred to as "forever chemicals" because they're nearly impossible to destroy. They're able to resist stains, grease and water, so are used</p>

to make products such as workout clothing, raincoats and firefighters' turnout gear, which is designed to block both moisture and heat.

In addition to certain cancers, PFAS have also been linked to risks of low birth weight, high cholesterol and [thyroid disease](#).

So on Tuesday, the International Association of Fire Fighters, or IAFF, and the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association advised firefighters to wear turnout gear only when absolutely necessary, in order to reduce their exposure to the chemicals.

"It is essential that unnecessary carcinogens are eliminated or mitigated until we can find gear that poses no health risks to our firefighters," said Dr. Danny Whu, the union's chief medical officer.

The groups also recommended that firefighters seal the gear in a container or a bag during transport, wash their hands after touching the items and avoid bringing them into firehouse living areas.

The advisory is based on [research](#) showing that [PFAS can leach out of turnout gear](#) onto firefighters' skin and [potentially enter their bloodstream](#). But it's hard to quantify precisely how often that happens or what health risks different exposure levels pose.

"We actually know very little about how PFAS penetrates through the skin," said Jamie DeWitt, a toxicology professor at East Carolina University.

"Presumably, it is possible and contributes to the overall health risks that firefighters face from their exposure to PFAS," she said.

Firefighters may be at particular risk of exposure to PFAS from clothing because they wear their gear for long periods of time, often while they're sweating and exposed to high heat, DeWitt said.

"When you're sweating, your pores open up, your capillaries dilate. So it's easier to absorb things that might be in materials that are on your skin," she said.

But 3M, a manufacturer of turnout gear, questioned the association of PFAS with health risks like cancer.

"Global health agencies and researchers acknowledge the limited nature of evidence indicating that PFAS cause harmful effects for specific health endpoints," the company said in a statement.

Firefighters also get exposed to PFAS through foam used on fires that are difficult to extinguish, though some fire departments have replaced the foam with PFAS-free alternatives.

DeWitt said the foam likely poses a greater health threat than turnout gear because firefighters are "drenched in it, and possibly even ingesting and inhaling some of it and absorbing it through their eyes and other mucous membranes."

The International Association of Fire Fighters said that PFAS is just one source of cancer risk that firefighters face on the job. Cancer caused 61% of line-of-duty deaths among career firefighters from January 2002 to December 2016, according to the union, due to factors such as smoke inhalation and chemical exposure. Firefighters have a 9% higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer than the overall U.S. population, according to [federal data](#), and a 14% higher risk of dying from cancer.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer recently classified firefighting as an occupation as carcinogenic. Whu said the union is trying to eliminate exposures where it can, with the understanding that the job still carries risk.

	<p>"We can't control most of the toxins we encounter on the fire ground, but we can and must control the unnecessary exposures to chemicals like PFAS in our personal protective equipment," he said.</p> <p>Most people in the United States have been exposed to PFAS and have the chemicals in their blood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. PFAS have been found in many consumer goods, including food packaging, carpets, cookware and personal care products.</p> <p>The chemicals can lurk in drinking water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, PFAS may pose health risks at near-zero concentrations in water, so the agency set new limits for levels of PFAS in drinking water in June.</p> <p>DeWitt said that to the best of scientists' knowledge, any type of exposure to PFAS can result in negative health outcomes.</p> <p>She added that for firefighters, wearing turnout gear only in emergency scenarios could reduce exposure to the chemicals, but it won't fully solve the problem.</p> <p>"I wouldn't want firefighters to get the message that they shouldn't be fully protected when they need to be fully protected by that turnout gear," DeWitt said. "The solution is finding alternative moisture barriers to protect firefighters that don't contain PFAS."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 US: 'gaps remain' Iran nuclear draft deal
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/u-s-responds-iran-nuclear-deal-draft/
GIST	<p>The United States is not yet satisfied with the European Union's self-declared final draft of a revived nuclear deal with Iran.</p> <p>"Gaps remain. We're not there yet," National Security Council strategic communications coordinator John Kirby told reporters Wednesday.</p> <p>The U.S. sent its response to the European Union on Wednesday, after several days of studying Iran's written proposal.</p> <p>After more than a week since the U.S. received Iran's comments on the EU's final proposal, State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters Wednesday, "Our review of those comments has now concluded. We have responded to the EU today."</p> <p>The State Department wouldn't comment what the next steps might be, nor on a timeframe, following months of indirect talks between the U.S. and Iran with the EU mediating.</p> <p>Iran's foreign ministry confirmed receipt of the U.S. response on Wednesday and said that it has begun a "detailed review."</p> <p>Without being specific, Kirby said, "Iran did accede to some concessions, and that has allowed us to get where we are in the process, and we are closer now than we were even just a couple of weeks ago."</p> <p>Kirby also said that Iran must answer questions from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nation's nuclear watchdog. "Our position on that is not going to change."</p> <p>"The IAEA detected (uranium) particles and needs information now about where those came from," he added.</p> <p>President Biden campaigned on a promise to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an international agreement under which Iran paused its nuclear program in exchange for international sanctions relief. The U.S. exited the deal under President Trump who argued that it was not</p>

sufficiently tough on Iran for its destabilizing actions in the Middle East, which were not addressed in the JCPOA.

Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid told foreign reporters earlier on Wednesday that the current deal on the table is a "bad one" and that "it does not meet the standards set by President Biden himself: preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state."

Lapid complained that "the Iranians are making demands again," even though the EU has already finalized its draft for a deal. Now, that draft seems less final, he suggested — "the negotiators are ready to make concessions, again."

"The countries of the West draw a red line, the Iranians ignore it, and the red line moves," Lapid said. "If the Iranians didn't 'take it,' why didn't the world 'leave it?'"

He reiterated that Israel is not a participant in the deal and remains free to act against Iran in preventing it from developing a bomb. Israel has long argued that the JCPOA, the nuclear deal struck between the Obama administration, Western allies and partners and Iran back in 2015, will not stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon in the long run.

Israel's national security adviser Eyal Hulata met with his U.S. counterpart, Jake Sullivan, at the White House on Tuesday, ahead of a meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman on Wednesday.

Lapid also claimed that the deal currently on the table "would give Iran \$100 billion a year" and warned the Islamic Republic would use the funds to further undermine stability in the Middle East through activities by its Revolutionary Guards, as well as Iran-backed militia groups throughout the region.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed earlier on Wednesday that the U.S. military conducted precision airstrikes on facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard in Deir Ezzor, Syria, in response to an Aug. 15 attack on U.S. personnel "by Iran-backed groups."

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Dr. Colin Kahl told reporters Wednesday "whether the JCPOA is reborn or not, it actually has nothing to do with our willingness and resolve to defend ourselves." Noting U.S. airstrikes Tuesday against Iranian-backed militias in Syria, Kahl added, "I think the strike last night was a pretty clear communication to the Iranians that these things are on different tracks."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Georgia: 3 children test monkeypox positive
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/children-georgia-test-positive-monkeypox-officials/story?id=88821100
GIST	<p>Three children in Georgia have now tested positive for monkeypox, newly updated state data has revealed.</p> <p>The Georgia Department of Health did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment on these cases.</p> <p>Newton County School System, which went back to school in early August, confirmed to ABC News that at least one child at Mansfield Elementary in Mansfield, Georgia, has tested positive for the virus, and one student at Flint Hill Elementary in Oxford, Georgia, is currently undergoing testing.</p> <p>It is unclear if these cases are at all connected. The schools are located approximately 13 miles apart. Additional information on how the students may have contracted or been exposed to the virus is unavailable at this time, due to privacy concerns, according to school officials.</p> <p>The school district has notified parents, officials said, and parents of students considered to be close contacts will receive separate communications instructing them on next steps.</p>

	<p>"NCSS facilities employees will thoroughly clean and disinfect classrooms and other areas at both schools this afternoon to ensure ongoing safe and healthy learning and work environments for students and staff. Both schools will be open tomorrow," the school district wrote in a statement on Tuesday.</p> <p>Across the state of Georgia, at least 15 children, ages 17 years and younger, have received their first monkeypox vaccine dose, state data shows.</p> <p>Separately, in Texas, officials confirmed that a previously confirmed monkeypox case had actually turned out to be a false positive.</p> <p>Across the country, at least 13 children have now tested positive for monkeypox. Nine states and jurisdictions have reported pediatric monkeypox cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Germany tightens Covid rules for travel
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/germany-tightens-covid-rules-travel-fall-winter-88790146
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Cabinet approved legislation Wednesday that ensures basic protective measures against the coronavirus pandemic are continued during the fall and winter when more virus cases are expected.</p> <p>The presentation of the rules — which also include the new obligation to wear N95-type face masks during all long-distance travel by train and bus as well as on planes — coincided with the publication of photos showing the chancellor and German Economy Minister Robert Habeck flying to Canada earlier this week without wearing masks.</p> <p>The pictures triggered strong public criticism of an alleged double standard for politicians and regular people. Currently, medical face masks are mandatory on planes and public transport though N95-style masks are recommended.</p> <p>Justice Minister Marco Buschmann and Health Minister Karl Lauterbach told reporters that the specific pandemic rules that apply to the German air force, which operates government flights, were met and that everyone on the flight, which also included German business leaders and reporters, took a PCR test before boarding the plane.</p> <p>Still, the justice minister conceded that “politically, I would recommend to us as a federal government that we apply the same rules everywhere that apply elsewhere.”</p> <p>“Because otherwise, of course, the feeling arises that you’re willing to impose something on the citizens that you don’t want to impose on yourself,” Buschmann added. “And that’s why I can also understand to some extent that there’s so much talk about it.”</p> <p>In addition to the mandatory use of N95-type masks during long-distance travel, the new measures, which will apply from Oct. 1 to April 7, will also include a nationwide obligation to wear masks in and test before accessing hospitals, nursing homes and similar institutions with vulnerable people.</p> <p>Beyond that, Germany’s 16 states will have the authority to adopt their own rules depending on how severely the virus affects their areas. State governments could decide to require masks on local public transportation, in schools for students in the fifth grade and up, and at public indoor events. If the virus spreads widely again, the number of people at public events can be limited and testing can be demanded.</p> <p>The justice minister stressed that there would be no more lockdowns or school closures no matter how the pandemic develops during cold-weather seasons.</p> <p>“Students were certainly the group that suffered the most in the pandemic ... especially in terms of exercising their right to education, especially in terms of school closures,” Buschmann said. “And that’s</p>

	<p>why I'm also glad that we were able to quickly agree that the instrument of school closures is therefore completely disproportionate.”</p> <p>The new regulations still need to go to Germany's lower and upper house of parliament for approval, but they are expected to pass.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Rohingya mark exodus to Bangladesh
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rohingya-mark-5th-anniversary-exodus-bangladesh-88830502
GIST	<p>DHAKA, Bangladesh -- Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees on Thursday marked the fifth anniversary of their exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh, while the United States, European Union and other Western nations pledged to continue supporting the refugees' pursuit of justice in international courts.</p> <p>Bangladesh is hosting more than 1 million Rohingya refugees who fled from Myanmar over decades, including some 740,000 who crossed the border in August 2017 after the Myanmar military launched a “clearance operation” against them following attacks by a rebel group. The safety situation in Myanmar has worsened since a military takeover last year, and attempts to send them back failed.</p> <p>In March, the United States said the oppression of Rohingya in Myanmar amounts to genocide after authorities confirmed accounts of mass atrocities against civilians by Myanmar’s military in a widespread and systematic campaign against the ethnic minority. Muslim Rohingya face widespread discrimination in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where most are denied citizenship and many other rights.</p> <p>Bangladeshi officials have expressed frustration over the repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar after at least two attempts to send them back failed since 2017, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that their repatriation to their own land is the only solution to the crisis.</p> <p>On the eve of the anniversary, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said in a statement that his country wants the refugees to return to Myanmar safely.</p> <p>“Bangladesh wants to ensure that the Rohingya can return home to safe conditions in Myanmar where they will no longer be persecuted and will finally receive citizenship,” he said.</p> <p>“We urge the international community to work alongside us to provide support to the Rohingya people, by asserting pressure on Myanmar to stop the mass persecution and allow Rohingya safe repatriation to their homes,” Khan said.</p> <p>The issue of the Rohingya crisis has gone to international courts where Myanmar denied charges of any wrongdoing. But global powers are not satisfied with Myanmar’s position.</p> <p>In a statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said Wednesday that the U.S. remained “committed to advancing justice and accountability” for Rohingya and all people of Myanmar.</p> <p>“We continue to support the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, the case under the Genocide Convention that The Gambia has brought against Burma before the International Court of Justice, and credible courts around the world that have jurisdiction in cases involving Burmese military’s atrocity crimes,” Blinken said.</p> <p>Separately, a joint statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, and the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States said they remained concerned by the U.N. fact-finding mission’s establishment of consistent patterns of serious human rights violations and abuses, of which many amount to grave crimes under international law.</p>

	<p>“We also recognize other initiatives to hold perpetrators accountable, including The Gambia’s efforts before the International Court of Justice, which is currently examining whether the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military against Rohingya amounted also to genocide,” the statement reads.</p> <p>“We reiterate that Myanmar must comply with the International Court of Justice’s provisional measures order,” it said.</p> <p>Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also urged action.</p> <p>In a statement, Human Rights Watch said the anniversary should prompt concerned governments to do more to hold the Myanmar military to account and secure justice and safety for the Rohingya in Bangladesh, Myanmar and across the region.</p> <p>“Governments should mark the five-year anniversary of the devastating campaign against the Rohingya with a coordinated international strategy for accountability and justice that draws on Rohingya input,” said Elaine Pearson, acting Asia director at Human Rights Watch.</p> <p>Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral agreement in November 2017, brokered by China, for repatriation of the refugees. Bangladesh earlier this month sought China's assistance to help repatriate Rohingya to Myanmar during a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Ukraine fears run high over nuclear plant
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukrainian-fears-run-high-fighting-nuclear-plant-88831673
GIST	<p>NIKOPOL, Ukraine -- Ukrainians are once again anxious and alarmed about the fate of a nuclear power plant in a land that was home to the world’s worst atomic accident in 1986 at Chernobyl.</p> <p>The Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, Europe's largest, has been occupied by Russian forces since the early days of the war, and continued fighting near the facility has heightened fears of a catastrophe that could affect nearby towns in southern Ukraine — or potentially an even wider region.</p> <p>The government in Kyiv alleges Russia is essentially holding the Soviet-era nuclear plant hostage, storing weapons there and launching attacks from around it, while Moscow accuses Ukraine of recklessly firing on the facility, which is located in the city of Enerhodar.</p> <p>“Anybody who understands nuclear safety issues has been trembling for the last six months,” said Mycle Schneider, an independent policy consultant and coordinator of the World Nuclear Industry Status Report.</p> <p>Ukraine cannot simply shut down its nuclear plants during the war because it is heavily reliant on them, and its 15 reactors at four stations provide about half of its electricity. Still, an ongoing conflict near a working atomic plant is troubling for many experts who fear that a damaged facility could lead to a disaster.</p> <p>That fear is palpable just across the Dnieper River in Nikopol, where residents have been under nearly constant Russian shelling since July 12, with eight people killed, 850 buildings damaged and over the half the population of 100,000 fleeing the city.</p> <p>Liudmyla Shyshkina, a 74-year-old widow who lived within sight of the Zaporizhzhia plant before her apartment was bombarded and her husband killed, said she believes the Russians are capable of intentionally causing a nuclear disaster.</p> <p>Fighting in early March caused a brief fire at the plant’s training complex, which officials said did not result in the release of any radiation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Russia’s military actions there amount to “nuclear blackmail.”</p>

No civilian nuclear plant is designed for a wartime situation, although the buildings housing Zaporizhzhia's six reactors are protected by reinforced concrete that could withstand an errant shell, experts say.

The more immediate concern is that a disruption of electricity supply to the plant could knock out cooling systems that are essential for the safe operation of the reactors, and emergency diesel generators are sometimes unreliable. The pools where spent fuel rods are kept to be cooled also are vulnerable to shelling, which could cause the release of radioactive material.

Kyiv told the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, that shelling earlier this week damaged transformers at a nearby conventional power plant, disrupting electricity supplies to the Zaporizhzhia plant for several hours.

"These incidents show why the IAEA must be able to send a mission to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant very soon," said the agency's head, Rafael Mariano Grossi, adding that he expected that to happen "within the next few days, if ongoing negotiations succeed."

At a U.N. Security Council meeting Tuesday, U.N. political chief Rosemary DiCarlo urged the withdrawal of all military personnel and equipment from the plant and an agreement on a demilitarized zone around it.

Currently only one of the plant's four power lines connecting it to the grid is operational, the agency said. External power is essential not just to cool the two reactors still in operation but also the spent radioactive fuel stored in special facilities onsite.

"If we lose the last one, we are at the total mercy of emergency power generators," said Najmedin Meshkati, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Southern California.

He and Schneider expressed concern that the occupation of the plant by Russian forces is also hampering safety inspections and the replacement of critical parts, and is putting severe strain on hundreds of Ukrainian staff who operate the facility.

"Human error probability will be increased manifold by fatigue," said Meshkati, who was part of a committee appointed by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences to identify lessons from the 2011 nuclear disaster at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant. "Fatigue and stress are unfortunately two big safety factors."

If an incident at the Zaporizhzhia plant were to release significant amounts of radiation, the scale and location of the contamination would be determined largely by the weather, said Paul Dorfman, a nuclear safety expert at the University of Sussex who has advised the British and Irish governments.

The massive earthquake and tsunami that hit the Fukushima plant destroyed cooling systems which triggered meltdowns in three of its reactors. Much of the contaminated material was blown out to sea, limiting the damage.

The April 26, 1986, explosion and fire at one of four reactors at the Chernobyl nuclear plant north of Kyiv sent a cloud of radioactive material across a wide swath of Europe and beyond. In addition to fueling anti-nuclear sentiment in many countries, the disaster left deep psychological scars on Ukrainians.

Zaporizhzhia's reactors are of a different model than those at Chernobyl, but unfavorable winds could still spread radioactive contamination in any direction, Dorfman said.

"If something really went wrong, then we have a full-scale radiological catastrophe that could reach Europe, go as far as the Middle East, and certainly could reach Russia, but the most significant contamination would be in the immediate area," he said.

That's why Nikopol's emergency services department takes radiation measurements every hour since the Russian invasion began. Before that, it was every four hours.

HEADLINE	08/24 'Drone boy' hailed as hero in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/drone-boy-hero-ukraine-taking-line-russian-tanks/story?id=88740689
GIST	<p>Andrii Pokrasa is being hailed as a hero in Ukraine, known to the public as "Drone Boy," after he helped a crucial Ukrainian military operation using his drone.</p> <p>Andrii, 15, helped by his father, put his life in danger and sent the Ukrainian military the coordinates of advancing Russian forces during the early days of the war.</p> <p>The war in Ukraine, which has raged on for six months, has had a particularly brutal effect on children.</p> <p>Nearly 1,000 children have been killed or injured during the war, UNICEF estimates, and more than 5 million Ukrainian children both in the country and living as refugees abroad are in need of humanitarian aid.</p> <p>"My mother was very scared at first," Andrii told ABC News reporter Britt Clennett. "But now she is proud that we did well, that we are healthy and that we were able to help.</p> <p>Andrii said that they posted in a local village group that they had a drone, and that Andrii knew how to operate it. A man named Yuri Kasyanov from the civil defense forces responded to their post, Andrii told ABC News, adding that "he didn't know that I'm 15."</p> <p>Andrii was asked to use his drone to spy on advancing Russian vehicles in Makariv, a village near his own village of Kolonschyna, in the outskirts of Kiev.</p> <p>"There were fuel trucks, tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers," he said. "I tracked them on a drone, they were in my picture. And then I opened the tab with the map on the drone and put a mark on it and the coordinates appeared there."</p> <p>Andrii said he passed the coordinates to Kasyanov, who passed them on to the Ukrainian artillery. The artillery decimated the column of Russian tanks within minutes.</p> <p>They were near enough to an explosion related to the attack that they had to evacuate the area, he said.</p> <p>"Yuri organized a green corridor for us - a convoy," he said. "We went through this field to the Zhytomyr highway that had already been liberated by that time."</p> <p>Andrii said his friends didn't believe him at first when he recounted his story of helping to defeat Russian forces, but then they saw him on TV.</p> <p>"My friends are very happy that everything turned out and I am fine," he said. "I had to help because I could."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Ukraine Independence Day attack: 22 killed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-marks-independence-day-months-start-war-88780564
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian forces Wednesday launched a rocket attack on a Ukrainian train station on the embattled country's Independence Day, killing 22 people, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after warning for days that Moscow might attempt "something particularly cruel" this week.</p> <p>The lethal attack took place in Chaplyne, a town of about 3,500 people in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukrainian news agencies quoted Zelenskyy as telling the U.N. Security Council via video. The president's office also reported that an 11-year-old child was killed by rocket fire earlier in the day in the settlement.</p>

“Chaplyne is our pain today,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation.

At one point, Zelenskyy put the number of wounded at about 50. The deputy head of Zelenskyy's office later said 22 people were wounded in the attack, which hit five passenger rail cars.

Ukraine had been bracing for especially heavy attacks around the national holiday that commemorates Ukraine's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Wednesday also marked the six-month point in the war.

Days ahead of Independence Day, Kyiv authorities banned large gatherings in the capital through Thursday for fear of missile strikes.

Residents of Kyiv, which has been largely spared in recent months, woke up Wednesday to air raid sirens, but no immediate strikes followed. As the day wore on, Russian bombardments were reported in the country's east, west and center, with the most serious attack apparently at the train station.

Outgoing British Prime Minister Boris Johnson marked the holiday with a visit to Kyiv — his third since the war broke out — and other European leaders used the occasion to pledge unwavering support for Ukraine, locked in a battle that was widely expected to be a lightning conquest by Moscow but has turned into a grinding war of attrition. U.S. President Joe Biden announced a new military aid package of nearly \$3 billion to help Ukrainian forces fight for years to come.

Over the weekend, Zelenskyy cautioned that Russia “may try to do something particularly nasty, something particularly cruel” this week. He repeated the warnings ahead of the train station attack, saying, “Russian provocations and brutal strikes are a possibility.”

Nevertheless, a festive atmosphere prevailed during the day at Kyiv's Maidan square as thousands of residents posed for pictures next to burned-out Russian tanks put on display. Folk singers set up, and many revelers — ignoring the sirens — were out and about in traditionally embroidered dresses and shirts.

Others were fearful.

“I can’t sleep at night because of what I see and hear about what is being done in Ukraine,” said a retiree who gave only her first name, Tetyana, her voice shaking with emotion. “This is not a war. It is the destruction of the Ukrainian people.”

In a holiday message to the country, Zelenskyy exulted over Ukraine's success in fending off Moscow's forces since the invasion, saying: “On Feb. 24, we were told: You have no chance. On Aug. 24, we say: Happy Independence Day, Ukraine!”

Britain's Johnson urged Western allies to stand by Ukraine through the winter.

“This is not the time to put forward flimsy negotiating proposals,” he said. “You can’t negotiate with a bear when it’s eating your leg or with a street robber when he has you pinned to the floor.”

A car bombing outside Moscow that killed the 29-year-old daughter of right-wing Russian political theorist Alexander Dugin on Saturday also heightened fears that Russia might intensify attacks on Ukraine this week. Russian officials have blamed Ukraine for the death of Darya Dugina, a pro-Kremlin TV commentator. Ukraine has denied any involvement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces have encountered unexpectedly stiff Ukrainian resistance in their invasion and abandoned their effort to storm the capital in the spring. The fighting has turned into a slog that has reduced neighborhoods to rubble and sent shock waves through the world economy.

Return to Top	<p>Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, speaking Wednesday at a meeting of his counterparts from a security organization dominated by Russia and China, claimed the slow pace of Moscow's military action was due to what he said was an effort to spare civilians.</p> <p>Russian forces have repeatedly targeted civilian areas in cities, including hospitals and a Mariupol theater where hundreds of people were taking shelter.</p> <p>But Shoigu said Russia is carrying out strikes with precision weapons against Ukrainian military targets, and "everything is done to avoid civilian casualties."</p> <p>"Undoubtedly, it slows down the pace of the offensive, but we do it deliberately," he said.</p> <p>On the battlefield, Russian forces struck several towns and villages in Donetsk province in the east over 24 hours, killing one person, authorities said. A building materials superstore in the city of Donetsk was hit by a shell and erupted in flames, the mayor said. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.</p> <p>In the Dnipropetrovsk region, the Russians again shelled the cities of Nikopol and Marhanets, damaging several buildings and wounding people, authorities said. Russian troops also shelled the city of Zaporizhzhia, but no casualties were reported.</p> <p>In addition, Russian rockets struck unspecified targets in the Khmelnytskyi region, about 300 kilometers (180 miles) west of Kyiv, the regional governor said. Attacks there have been infrequent.</p>
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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	08/25 Kimusky targets SKorea diplomats, officials
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/08/researchers-uncover-kimusky-infra.html
GIST	<p>The North Korean nation-state group Kimusky has been linked to a new set of malicious activities directed against political and diplomatic entities located in its southern counterpart in early 2022.</p> <p>Russian cybersecurity firm Kaspersky codenamed the cluster GoldDragon, with the infection chains leading to the deployment of Windows malware designed to file lists, user keystrokes, and stored web browser login credentials.</p> <p>Included among the potential victims are South Korean university professors, think tank researchers, and government officials.</p> <p>Kimsuky, also known as Black Banshee, Thallium, and Velvet Chollima, is the name given to a prolific North Korean advanced persistent threat (APT) group that targets entities globally, but with a primary focus on South Korea, to gain intelligence on various topics of interest to the regime.</p> <p>Known to be operating since 2012, the group has a history of employing social engineering tactics, spear-phishing, and watering hole attacks to exfiltrate desired information from victims.</p> <p>Late last month, cybersecurity firm Volexity attributed the actor to an intelligence gathering mission designed to siphon email content from Gmail and AOL via a malicious Chrome browser extension dubbed Sharptext.</p> <p>The latest campaign follows a similar modus operandi wherein the attack sequence is initiated via spear-phishing messages containing macro-embedded Microsoft Word documents that purportedly feature content related to geopolitical issues in the region.</p>

	<p>Alternative initial access routes are also said to take advantage of HTML Application (HTA) and Compiled HTML Help (CHM) files as decoys to compromise the system.</p> <p>Regardless of the method used, the initial access is followed by dropping a Visual Basic Script from a remote server that's orchestrated to fingerprint the machine and retrieve additional payloads, including an executable capable of exfiltrating sensitive information.</p> <p>What's novel about the attack is the transmission of the victim's email address to the command-and-control (C2) server should the recipient click a link in the email to download additional documents. If the request doesn't contain an expected email address, a benign document is returned.</p> <p>To further complicate the kill chain, the first-stage C2 server forwards the victim's IP address to another VBS server, which then compares it with an incoming request that's generated after the target opens the lure document.</p> <p>The "victim verification methodology" in the two C2 servers ensures that the VBScript is delivered only when the IP address checks are successful, indicating a highly targeted approach.</p> <p>"The Kimsuky group continuously evolves its malware infection schemes and adopts novel techniques to hinder analysis," Kaspersky researcher Seongsu Park said. "The main difficulty in tracking this group is that it's tough to acquire a full-infection chain."</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 HHS warns: Karakurt ransomware attacks
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/karakurt-ransomware-group-targeting-healthcare-providers-hhs-warns
GIST	<p>Provider organizations are being warned to be on the alert for cyberattacks levied by the Karakurt ransomware group after at least four cyberattacks by the threat actors against the healthcare sector in the last three months.</p> <p>Those observed attacks included an assisted living facility, a dental firm, a provider and a hospital.</p> <p>An alert from the Department of Health and Human Services Cybersecurity Coordination Center (HC3) notes that while Karakurt emerged in late 2021, their impact is heightened by their likely ties to the Conti ransomware group, either as a working relationship or as a side business of Conti.</p> <p>Federal agencies have long warned of the risk the Conti ransomware group poses to the healthcare sector, having successfully targeted more than 16 providers since early 2021.</p> <p>The Karakurt actors' attack flow mirrors typical ransomware groups, claiming to steal data and threatening to auction it off on the dark web or release it to the public unless their demands are met. The ransoms range from \$25,000 to \$13,000,000 in Bitcoin with deadlines often set to expire within just one week of the initial contact by the cybercriminals.</p> <p>What's most troubling about Karakurt is their "extensive harassment campaigns against victims to shame them," according to HC3.</p> <p>This was recently evidenced by the Karakurt campaign against Methodist McKinney Hospital in early July. The actors threatened to release the data they allegedly stole from the hospital system, but Methodist McKinney instead informed patients of the ongoing attack and continued investigation about the possible data theft.</p> <p>Karakurt gains access by purchasing stolen login credentials through cybercrime partnerships who may provide the group with access to already compromised victims, or by "buying access to already</p>

compromised victims via third-party intrusion broker networks.” Among its exploited vulnerabilities are outdated SonicWall VPNs, Log4j, phishing, and outdated Windows Servers.

The impact is also caused by Karakurt’s typical two-month dwell time, where the actors conduct scanning, reconnaissance, and data collection against the victims. The actors compress the files in order to exfiltrate large sums of data, “and, in many cases, entire network-connected shared drives in volumes exceeding 1 terabyte using open-source applications and FTP.

For healthcare, the access and exfiltration certainly includes patients’ protected health information like medical histories, health insurance details, diagnoses, and treatments.

“Once access to a compromised system has been obtained, Karakurt actors deploy Cobalt Strike beacons to enumerate a network, install Mimikatz to pull plain-text credentials, use AnyDesk to obtain persistent remote control, and utilize additional situation-dependent tools to elevate privileges and move laterally within a network,” according to the alert.

After exfiltration, Karakurt delivers the ransom note in “readme.txt” files to employee email accounts of the victim organization. The messages include instructions on how to chat with the actors to negotiate a price to have the data deleted.

It’s during these conversations where “victims have reported extensive harassment campaigns,” where Karakurt engages with employees, business partners, and clients sending numerous emails and phone calls “warning the recipients to encourage the victims to negotiate ... to prevent the dissemination of victim data.”

In response to the possible impact, HC3 recommends providers review operations security and leverage the recommendations outlined in the alert. Providers will also find a complete list of Karakurt tactics, known vulnerability exploits, and indicators of compromise.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Plex streaming media data breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/plex-suffers-data-breach/
GIST	<p>Streaming media platform Plex sent out an email to all its users on Wednesday, August 24, advising them to change their passwords as soon as possible.</p> <p>In the communication message, the company said it discovered suspicious activity on one of its databases on Tuesday, August 23.</p> <p>"We immediately began an investigation and it does appear that a third-party was able to access a limited subset of data that includes emails, usernames, and encrypted passwords," Plex wrote.</p> <p>The streaming platform did not confirm whether any personally identifiable information (PII) or private media libraries were compromised but did mention that all account passwords that could have been accessed were secured.</p> <p>"Even though all account passwords that could have been accessed were hashed and secured in accordance with best practices, out of an abundance of caution we are requiring all Plex accounts to have their password reset," the Plex email reads.</p> <p>"Rest assured that credit card and other payment data are not stored on our servers at all and were not vulnerable in this incident," the company added.</p> <p>Further, Plex asked customers to make sure the checkbox "sign out connected devices after password change" was ticked during the password-changing process.</p>

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HEADLINE	08/24 India federal police, bank data exposed
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/indian-federal-police-banking-database-exposed/
GIST	<p>The IT security researchers at Cybernews have discovered a database containing financial fraud investigation records and other sensitive data belonging to the Indian federal police.</p> <p>The publicly exposed database also included bank account holder names, balances, account numbers, transaction types, amounts, destinations, and cases taken up by the Central Bureau of Intelligence (CBI) India.</p> <p>In total, the database contained 335 million records or roughly 24GB worth of data. The dataset was discovered when the researchers performed an open-source intelligence investigation of Elasticsearch and Kibana hosted by France-based cloud computing firm OVHCloud.</p> <p>What's even worse, researchers identified records of more than 200 banks in the open database. Furthermore, the database included case-related information of private companies, which were investigated by local police regarding fraudulent practices and taken to court.</p> <p>The owner of this database is currently unidentified, but considering the nature of the information it contains, researchers believe it can be assumed that it belongs to a private fraud investigating agency or a court in India.</p> <p>Potential Dangers</p> <p>Threat actors can exploit financial information to illegally access accounts and steal funds from them. Using financial inquiry data, scammers can approach people who have been named in fraud cases and cheat them.</p> <p>Although the database was secured quickly, it is still quite risky considering that highly sensitive data was publicly exposed.</p> <p>In their blog post, Cybernews researcher Aras Nazarovas explained the possible dangers of this uncalled-for data exposure.</p> <p>"While attackers could not use this data alone to cause any damage, it can be used in combination with data gathered from other attacks. It can also be useful to attackers who want to find target accounts with high balances. Payment descriptions could be used to track a target's spending habits."</p> <p><i>Aras Nazarovas – Cybernews</i></p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Holy Ghost ransomware attacks
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/lessons-from-holy-ghost-ransomware-attacks/
GIST	<p>Ransomware has become one of the defining malware types in the last few years. Locking, encrypting, and basically deleting the original data from the victim's PC, the hackers, or let's just call them cyber criminals, then seek to extort money for them in return for restored access to your critical data.</p> <p>In the meantime, you have utterly no idea what's been accessed and stolen, or if your extorted funds will even result in the release of your data. One of the most current threats, the so-called Holy Ghost Ransomware, or Sienna Purple, has several key lessons in cybersecurity to teach us. Let's take a look.</p> <p>Cybersecurity: Thinking Small Originating in North Korea, the Holy Ghost ransomware operation has preyed primarily on small businesses, but that doesn't mean larger businesses can ignore it. This is an interesting shift of focus, and highlights a key lesson straight out the gate- cybersecurity is now no longer just for 'big' or 'important' businesses.</p> <p>With the pandemic-accelerated shift to online and remote work, staying safe in cyberspace has become a business-critical concern. It's easy to assume you are too small or too 'uninteresting' to cyber criminals and hackers, but in a world that's ever-increasingly connected, this is no longer a safe stance to assume.</p> <p>Hackers know that small enterprises are less likely to have safety controls in place, making them a juicy target 'market' that's likely to grow as a target demographic. It's no longer safe to assume any business, no matter their digital presence, can slide on security precautions.</p> <p>Luckily, we're seeing a concurrent rise in focus on products aimed to help tighten and enhance security across a range of industries, combining scalability, affordability, and ease of use with fast deployment. Perimeter 81, for example, has a full suite unified business security solution, making security for your workers across regions and the globe a simple process.</p> <p>The Double Extortion We've also seen a swing to double extortion attempts in recent Ransomware attacks. Alongside the typical play for cash to return data, there's also the threat of publishing the victim's name and stolen data to the wider dark web.</p> <p>Do note that Holy Ghost, particularly, rarely actually delivers the decryption key or your software returned. Sadly, decryption is usually impossible without it, too, so the chances of recovering data after a breach are minimal. As always, strong preventative security and solid backups are the only solutions.</p> <p>Prevention is the only cure, here. Victims are highly advised not to pay the ransom over, as it simply goes to support further illegal activity. The ransom is typically asked for in Bitcoin.</p> <p>Evolving Ransomware Holy Ghost itself was first classified as Sienna Purple by the Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC). It started last June as a relatively unsophisticated BTLC_C.exe form. In October 2021, the Go-based variants, now classified as SiennaBlue (HolyRS.exe, HolyLocker.exe, and BTLC.exe) have greatly expanded functionality.</p> <p>You will now find internet/intranet support, multiple encryption options, public key management, and string obfuscation as standard. The ransomware gang itself is being traced as DEV-0530. They have some connection to the PLUTONIUM, or DarkSeoul, gang. The encrypted files typically end with the .h0lyenc suffix. Microsoft's full report has more.</p> <p>The Importance of Security Updates Common targets have been schools, banks, social/event planning companies, and manufacturing organizations. Most of these likely became targets of opportunity through vulnerabilities in public-facing</p>

web applications or their content-management systems as original points of access. In fact, the DotCMS remote code execution vulnerability, CVE-2022-26352, is thought to have been a key access point.

This highlights another critical point in the modern digital business environment- small and public institutions like these often fail to regularly [maintain and update](#) their OSs and programs across their organizations. And all it takes is one vulnerable PC on the network for the whole system to be infiltrated. While enterprise-level companies tend to have better update policies in place, you're never too large to check in on your regular IT maintenance protocols- a mistake in a large organization can easily be more costly.

Regular security updates are issued by most mainstream platforms, but many organizations lack a cohesive maintenance policy, and many workers are under-educated in the importance of cybersecurity tasks like security updates. They simply click away from the nag screen and return to work. After all, IT will handle that, right?

The need for cohesive and [organization-wide education](#) on the risks of cybercrime is critical but often neglected, especially in business.

Being Careful With Trust

Currently, the Holy Ghost website is down, and it may stay down, but it's also critical to note that they were leveraging their limited online presence to pose as a legitimate cybersecurity entity, actively promising to help visitors 'improve' their online security presence.

Of course, one [malicious entity masquerading as a legitimate cybersecurity company](#) doesn't mean all smaller cybersecurity companies are fake. However, the need for informed due diligence and being careful to work with well-known, trusted, and verified products/brands is clear. Again, they are trying to leverage the general public and business owners' lack of knowledge about cybercrime and its infiltration methods to lure victims in.

Political Interference

This is certainly not a new feature, nor one unique to Holy Ghost, but it bears repeating- many ransomware efforts show signs of hostile political interference at their core. As with the [Maui ransomware](#) currently predating on healthcare organizations, there are some links to the North Korean government itself in the Holy Ghost attacks. As the international stage gets more and more politically fraught, this is a pattern we're likely to see evolve.

As with all ransomware, the key takeaways from Holy Ghost ransomware include the need to invest in secure systems, no matter what size of business you are running. Deploying effective cybersecurity is a must of working in the digital age.

Always have secure backups through a variety of mediums, and make sure to stage them across time periods, so you don't end up in the unenviable position where the backup carries over the virus.

Communicating [cybersecurity risks](#) to staff members is essential. Ransomware commonly spreads through phishing emails, remote desktop protocols that are not correctly secured or communicated, infected downloads from compromised sites, and the insertion of infected media and USB devices. Ensuring staff is knowledgeable about these risks is one of the best possible investments, alongside proper security protocols and updates.

Ransomware as a malicious software category is set to grow further over the coming years, as [more workspaces enter the digital environment](#). Having proper preventative protocols in place is a must.

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransomexx-claims-ransomware-attack-on-sea-doo-ski-doo-maker/
GIST	<p>The RansomEXX ransomware gang is claiming responsibility for the cyberattack against Bombardier Recreational Products (BRP), disclosed by the company on August 8, 2022.</p> <p>At the time, the Canadian maker of Ski-Doo snowmobiles, Sea-Doo jet skis, ATVs, motorcycles, watercrafts, and Rotax engines informed the public of a temporary stop for all operations as a response to "malicious cyberactivity."</p> <p>The operational halt impacted production, too, and was expected to cause delays in certain transactions with customers and suppliers.</p> <p>BRP employs over 20,000 people, counts close to \$6 billion in annual sales, and distributes various products in more than 120 countries, so even a minimal disruption in its production can have a serious financial impact.</p> <p>On August 15, 2022, BRP provided an update on the situation, saying that four manufacturing sites in Canada, Finland, the U.S., and Austria resumed production, with the rest to follow suit by the end of that week.</p> <p>In the same statement, the company presented the first results of its internal investigation, saying that the hackers breached its systems via a supply chain attack.</p> <p>"The Company confirms that the malware infiltration came through a third-party service provider. BRP believes that the impact of the cyberattack was limited to its internal systems," the company states.</p> <p>"At this time, while the investigation is still ongoing, it has not revealed any evidence that its clients' personal information would have been affected by the attack" - Bombardier Recreational Products BRP promised to notify individuals or corporations directly if the ongoing investigation reveal a more widespread data breach.</p> <p>RansomEXX leaks files</p> <p>Yesterday, the RansomEXX gang listed Bombardier Recreational Products on its leak site along with 29.9GB of files allegedly stolen from the firm.</p> <p>The samples provided on the onion site include non-disclosure agreements, passports and IDs, material supply agreements, contract renewals, and more.</p> <p>It appears that the data breach doesn't include sensitive customer data, yet the exposure of the said documents is still damaging for BRP.</p> <p>Bombardier Recreational Products issued a statement today confirming that the leaked documents are authentic, adding that it is actively supporting impacted parties to mitigate the negative effects due to the exposure.</p> <p>"Based on the current status of its investigation, BRP also believes that the compromised information relating to certain of its suppliers is limited in quantity and sensitivity, and is in the process of contacting them," the company added.</p> <p>RansomEXX's extortion site lists seven victims in 2022, indicating that the gang's activity is quite low. However, it remains a threat for multiple platforms.</p> <p>Last year, RansomEXX hit some high-profile companies, such as Taiwanese hardware giant GIGABYTE, logistics firm Hellmann Worldwide, Ecuador's state-owned telco CNT, and Italian luxury fashion house Zegna.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Quantum ransomware Dominican Republic
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/quantum-ransomware-attack-disrupts-govt-agency-in-dominican-republic/
GIST	<p>The Dominican Republic's Instituto Agrario Dominicano has suffered a Quantum ransomware attack that encrypted multiple services and workstations throughout the government agency.</p> <p>The Instituto Agrario Dominicano (IAD) is part of the Ministry of Agriculture and is responsible for executing Agrarian Reform programs in the country.</p> <p>Local media reports that the ransomware attack occurred on August 18th, which has impacted the agency's operation.</p> <p>"They ask for more than 600 thousand dollars. We were affected by four physical servers and eight virtual servers; virtually all servers," IAD Director of Technology Walixson Amaury Nuñez told local media.</p> <p>The National Cybersecurity Center (CNCS), which has been assisting the agency recover from the attack, says that the IP addresses of the attackers were from the U.S. and Russia.</p> <p>"The information was totally compromised, because the databases, applications, emails, etc., were affected," assured Nuñez.</p> <p>The IAD has told local media that they only had basic security software on their systems, such as antivirus, and lack a dedicated security department.</p> <p>Quantum ransomware behind the attack</p> <p>BleepingComputer learned of the attack today from VenezuelaBTH, who said the agency was unlikely to pay a ransom as they cannot afford to do so.</p> <p>Our investigation discovered that the Quantum ransomware operation was behind the attack, which initially demanded a \$650,000 ransom from the agency.</p> <p>The threat actors claimed to have stolen over 1TB of data and threatened to release it if IAD did not pay a ransom publicly.</p> <p>Quantum is becoming a major player among enterprise-targeting ransomware operations, linked to an attack on PFC that impacted over 650 healthcare orgs</p> <p>The ransomware gang is believed to have become an offshoot of the Conti ransomware operation, which took over the previous rebrand of the MountLocker ransomware operation.</p> <p>MountLocker was first deployed in attacks starting in September 2020 but rebranded multiple times under various names, including AstroLocker, XingLocker, and finally Quantum.</p> <p>The rebrand to Quantum occurred in August 2021, when their ransomware encryptor switched to adding the .quantum file extension to encrypted files' names. After that, however, the rebrand never became particularly active, with the operation mostly lying dormant.</p> <p>That was until the Conti ransomware operation started shutting down, and its members began looking for other operations to infiltrate.</p> <p>According to Advanced Intel's Yelisey Boguslavskiy, some of the Conti cybercrime syndicate joined the ranks of the Quantum operation, which also immediately saw an increase in attacks.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 CISA: Palo Alto Networks firewall flaw, bug
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/cisa-palo-alto-firewall-bug-active-exploit
GIST	<p>The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) is warning that a high-severity security vulnerability in Palo Alto Networks firewalls is being actively exploited in the wild.</p> <p>The bug (CVE-2022-0028, with a CVSS severity score of 8.6), exists in the PAN-OS operating system that runs the firewalls, and could allow a remote threat actor to abuse the firewalls to deploy distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against targets of their choice — without having to authenticate.</p> <p>Exploitation of the issue can help attackers to cover their tracks and location.</p> <p>"The DoS attack would appear to originate from a Palo Alto Networks PA-Series (hardware), VM-Series (virtual) and CN-Series (container) firewall against an attacker-specified target," according to the Palo Alto Networks advisory issued earlier this month.</p> <p>"The good news is that this vulnerability does not provide attackers with access to the victim's internal network," says Phil Neray, vice president of cyber-defense strategy at CardinalOps. "The bad news is that it can halt business-critical operations [at other targets] such as taking orders and handling customer service requests."</p> <p>He notes that DDoS attacks aren't just mounted by small-time nuisance actors, as is often assumed: "DDoS has been used in the past by adversary groups like APT28 against the World Anti-Doping Agency."</p> <p>The bug arises thanks to a URL-filtering policy misconfiguration.</p> <p>Instances that use a non-standard configuration are at risk; to be exploited, the firewall configuration "must have a URL filtering profile with one or more blocked categories assigned to a security rule with a source zone that has an external facing network interface," the advisory read.</p> <p>Exploited in the Wild</p> <p>Two weeks since that disclosure, CISA said that it has now seen the bug being adopted by cyber adversaries in the wild, and it's added it to its Known Exploited Vulnerabilities (KEV) catalogue. Attackers can exploit the flaw to deploy both reflected and amplified versions of DoS floods.</p> <p>Bud Broomhead, CEO at Viakoo, says bugs that can be marshaled into service to support DDoS attacks are in more and more demand.</p> <p>"The ability to use a Palo Alto Networks firewall to perform reflected and amplified attacks is part of an overall trend to use amplification to create massive DDoS attacks," he says. "Google's recent announcement of an attack which peaked at 46 million requests per second, and other record-breaking DDoS attacks will put more focus on systems that can be exploited to enable that level of amplification."</p> <p>The speed of weaponization also fits the trend of cyberattackers taking increasingly less time to put newly disclosed vulnerabilities to work — but this also points to an increased interest in lesser-severity bugs on the part of threat actors.</p> <p>"Too often, our researchers see organizations move to patch the highest-severity vulnerabilities first based on the CVSS," Terry Olaes, director of sales engineering at Skybox Security, wrote in an emailed statement. "Cybercriminals know this is how many companies handle their cybersecurity, so they've learned to take advantage of vulnerabilities seen as less critical to carry out their attacks."</p> <p>But patch prioritization continues to be a challenge for organizations of all stripes and sizes thanks to the sheer number of patches that are disclosed in a given month — it totals hundreds of vulnerabilities that IT teams need to triage and assess, often without much guidance to go on. And furthermore Skybox Research Lab recently found that new vulnerabilities that went on to be exploited in the wild rose by 24% in 2022.</p>

"Any vulnerability that CISA warns you about, if you have in your environment, you need to patch now," Roger Grimes, data-driven defense evangelist at KnowBe4, tells Dark Reading. "The [KEV] lists all the vulnerabilities that were used by any real-world attacker to attack any real-world target. Great service. And it isn't just full of Windows or Google Chrome exploits. I think the average computer security person would be surprised about what's on the list. It's full of devices, firmware patches, VPNs, DVRs, and a ton of stuff that isn't traditionally thought of as being highly targeted by hackers."

Time to Patch & Monitor for Compromise

For the newly exploited PAN-OS bug, patches are available in the following versions:

- PAN-OS 8.1.23-h1
- PAN-OS 9.0.16-h3
- PAN-OS 9.1.14-h4
- PAN-OS 10.0.11-h1
- PAN-OS 10.1.6-h6
- PAN-OS 10.2.2-h2
- And all later PAN-OS versions for PA-Series, VM-Series and CN-Series firewalls.

To determine if the damage is already done, "organizations should ensure they have solutions in place capable of quantifying the business impact of cyber-risks into economic impact," Olaes wrote.

He added, "This will also help them identify and prioritize the most critical threats based on the size of financial impact, among other risk analyses such as exposure-based risk scores. They must also enhance the maturity of their vulnerability management programs to ensure they can quickly discover whether or not a vulnerability impacts them and how urgent it is to remediate."

Grimes notes that it's a good idea to subscribe to CISA's KEV emails as well.

"If you subscribe, you'll get at least an email a week, if not more, telling what the latest exploited vulnerabilities are," he says. "It isn't just a Palo Alto Networks problem. Not by any stretch of the imagination."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Microsoft warns: 'MagicWeb' malware
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/efficient-magicweb-malware-subverts-ad-fs-authentication-microsoft
GIST	<p>The attackers responsible for the SolarWinds supply chain attack have added a new arrow to their quiver of misery: A post-compromise capability dubbed MagicWeb, which is used to maintain persistent access to compromised environments and move laterally.</p> <p>Researchers at Microsoft observed the Russia-backed Nobelium APT using the backdoor after gaining administrative privileges to an Active Directory Federated Services (AD FS) server. With that privileged access, the attackers replace a legitimate DLL with the MagicWeb malicious DLL, so that the malware is loaded by AD FS as if it were legitimate.</p> <p>Like domain controllers, AD FS servers can authenticate users. MagicWeb facilitates this on the part of the threat actors by allowing manipulation of the claims passed in authentication tokens generated by an AD FS server; thus, they can authenticate as any user on the network.</p> <p>According to Microsoft, MagicWeb is a better iteration of the previously used specialized FoggyWeb tool, which also establishes a difficult-to-shake foothold inside victim networks.</p> <p>"MagicWeb goes beyond the collection capabilities of FoggyWeb by facilitating covert access directly," Microsoft researchers explained. "It manipulates the user authentication certificates used for authentication, not the signing certificates used in attacks like Golden SAML."</p>

	For now, MagicWeb use appears to be highly targeted, according to Microsoft's advisory .
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HEADLINE	08/24 Unusual Microsoft 365 phishing campaign
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/unusual-microsoft-365-phishing-efax-compromised-dynamic-voice-account?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>An elaborate and rather unusual phishing campaign is spoofing eFax notifications and using a compromised Dynamics 365 Customer Voice business account to lure victims into giving up their credentials via microsoft.com pages.</p> <p>Threat actors have hit dozens of companies through the broadly disseminated campaign, which is targeting Microsoft 365 users from a diverse range of sectors — including energy, financial services, commercial real estate, food, manufacturing, and even furniture-making, researchers from the Cofense Phishing Defense Center (PDC) revealed in a blog post published Wednesday.</p> <p>The campaign uses a combination of common and unusual tactics to lure users into clicking on a page that appears to lead them to a customer feedback survey for an eFax service, but instead steals their credentials.</p> <p>Attackers impersonate not only eFax but also Microsoft by using content hosted on multiple microsoft.com pages in several stages of the multistage effort. The scam is one of a number of phishing campaigns that Cofense has observed since spring that use a similar tactic, says Joseph Gallop, intelligence analysis manager at Cofense.</p> <p>“In April of this year, we began to see a significant volume of phishing emails using embedded ncv[.]microsoft[.]com survey links of the sort used in this campaign,” he tells Dark Reading.</p> <p>Combination of Tactics</p> <p>The phishing emails use a conventional lure, claiming the recipient has received a 10-page corporate eFax that demands his or her attention. But things diverge from the beaten path after that, Cofense PDC's Nathaniel Sagibanda explained in the Wednesday post.</p> <p>The recipient most likely will open the message expecting it's related to a document that needs a signature. "However, that isn't what we see as you read the message body," he wrote.</p> <p>Instead, the email includes what seems like an attached, unnamed PDF file that's been delivered from a fax that does include an actual file — an unusual feature of a phishing email, according to Gallop.</p> <p>"While a lot of credential phishing campaigns use links to hosted files, and some use attachments, it's less common to see an embedded link posing as an attachment," he wrote.</p> <p>The plot thickens even further down in the message, which contains a footer indicating that it was a survey site — such as those used to provide customer feedback — that generated the message, according to the post.</p> <p>Mimicking a Customer Survey</p> <p>When users click the link, they are directed to a convincing imitation of an eFax solution page rendered by a Microsoft Dynamics 365 page that's been compromised by attackers, researchers said.</p> <p>This page includes a link to another page, which appears to lead to a Microsoft Customer Voice survey to provide feedback on the eFax service, but instead takes victims to a Microsoft login page that exfiltrates their credentials.</p> <p>To further enhance legitimacy on this page, the threat actor went so far as to embed a video of eFax solutions for spoofed service details, instructing the user to contact "@eFaxdynamic365" with any inquiries, researchers said.</p>

The "Submit" button at the bottom of the page also serves as additional confirmation that the threat actor used a real Microsoft Customer Voice feedback form template in the scam, they added.

The attackers then modified the template with "spurious eFax information to entice the recipient into clicking the link," which leads to a faux Microsoft login page that sends their credentials to an external URL hosted by attackers, Sagibanda wrote.

Fooling a Trained Eye

While the original campaigns were much simpler — including only minimal information hosted on the Microsoft survey — the eFax spoofing campaign goes further to bolster the campaign's legitimacy, Gallop says.

Its combination of multistage tactics and dual impersonation may allow messages to slip through secure email gateways as well as fool even the savviest of corporate users who've been trained to spot phishing scams, he notes.

"Only the users that continue to check the URL bar at each stage throughout the entire process would be certain to identify this as a phishing attempt," Gallop says.

Indeed, [a survey by cybersecurity firm Vade](#) also released Wednesday found that [brand impersonation](#) continues to be the top tool that phishers use to dupe victims into clicking on malicious emails.

In fact, attackers took on the persona of Microsoft most often in campaigns observed in the first half of 2022, researchers found, though Facebook remains the most impersonated brand in phishing campaigns observed so far this year.

Phishing Game Remains Strong

Researchers at this time have not identified who might be behind the scam, nor attackers' specific motives for stealing credentials, Gallop says.

Phishing overall remains one of the easiest and most oft-used ways for threat actors to compromise victims, not only to steal credentials but also spread malicious software, as email-borne malware is significantly easier to distribute than remote attacks, according to the Vade report.

Indeed, this type of attack saw month-over-month increases through the second quarter of the year and then another boost in June that pushed "emails back to the alarming volumes not seen since January 2022," when Vade saw upwards of 100-plus million phishing emails in distribution.

"The relative ease with which hackers can deliver punishing cyberattacks via email makes email one of the top vectors for attack and a constant menace for businesses and end users," Vade's Natalie Petitto wrote in the report. "Phishing emails impersonate the brands you trust the most, offering a wide net of potential victims and a cloak of legitimacy for the phishers masquerading as brands."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Hackers breaking into Cash App accounts
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/dy7yyy/my-cash-app-hacked-hackers-stealing-money
GIST	<p>Hackers are breaking into unsuspecting victims' Cash App accounts, a massively popular payment app, and stealing hundreds of dollars, according to victims Motherboard spoke to. In one person's case, they said, Cash App has not reimbursed them for the stolen funds.</p> <p>"It's scary!" Liz Shelby, who said their son was a victim of the hacking, told Motherboard in an online chat. "My son saved up some cash for a small vacation with his grandma. We put it in his Cash App before he left. He called me on Aug. 9, and told me that his money was gone."</p>

Shelby said that after she looked at the account she found that someone else had logged into it and sent themselves the money. Shelby said she's been emailing Cash App support, without success.

"I'm not getting anywhere and I'm sure my son will never get his money back," she added.

Cash App is one of the most popular payment services apps, with over 50 million downloads from the Google Play Store. Cash App also gained some infamy for large scale cash giveaways on social media. The app is owned by payment services company Block, which was formerly known as Square. Jack Dorsey runs the company.

Marvis Herring, another target, told Motherboard that hackers attempted to steal \$1,400, in the form of two installments of \$700. In those cases, Herring believes his bank blocked the fraudulent transactions. Motherboard saw many other people reporting on social media that their Cash App accounts had been compromised in some way.

"The main thing I thought was weird is that I went to change my account password and there really isn't a password for Cash App accounts," Herring added. When users sign up to Cash App, they can use either an email address or a phone number to open an account. After doing so, they receive a login code sent to either of those.

On fraud websites, dark web marketplaces, and social media, multiple people appear to be selling login details associated with Cash App accounts. Some of these peoples' listings specify that the logs contain the email address and password for a linked email account. Some of the listings may be scams, but those on the dark web marketplaces come from fraudsters who have received positive feedback from alleged customers, according to the review system that is common on such sites. One listing for hacked Cash App accounts said the vendor has sold that specific item multiple times.

"Our Cashapp accounts are of the highest quality and we provide them at the most competitive prices on the market today," one listing reads. "Full Information Presented Recently Compromised." The listing says that buyers get the hacked login credentials, the victim's cookie file, and information such as what IP address the victim used. This sort of information can be useful to fraudsters to trick sites or apps into letting them log in as the user.

The listing claimed that the hacked Cash App accounts can include between \$1,000 and \$5,000 in available balance. It is common for members of the fraud ecosystem to fulfill different roles. Some focus on sourcing hacked accounts and then selling them, while others work on effectively cashing them out.

On its website, [Cash App encourages users](#) to make sure their linked email address has two-factor authentication enabled. The app also has [an extra feature called Security Lock](#) which means that each transfer requires the user to enter a PIN.

"Preventing fraud is critically important to Cash App. We continue to invest in and bolster fraud-fighting resources by both increasing staffing and adopting new technology. We are constantly improving systems and controls to help prevent, detect, and report bad activity on the platform," a Cash App spokesperson told Motherboard in a statement. "For those who believe they have fallen victim to an identity-theft or account take-over scams, we encourage them to reach out to Cash App Support where we will review the account in question. If deemed fraudulent, we will take the necessary action starting with account closure and disablement of all applicable products."

Fraudsters also appear to be offering Cash App accounts for another purpose: laundering money. Motherboard found multiple listings on a dark web marketplace offering these newly created and verified accounts. Cash App requires users to verify their identity to use some features, and this can require them providing their Social Security Number with the platform. These already verified accounts will allow fraudsters to buy Bitcoin through the Cash App without having to verify their identity, the listing suggests.

HEADLINE	08/24 DHS officially cancels disinformation board
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/24/alejandro-mayorkas-officially-cancels-dhs-disinfor/
GIST	<p>Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas put the final kibosh on his disinformation governance board on Wednesday, after a review he ordered came back with a firm recommendation that the idea was a stinker.</p> <p>The board had been on hold since May, when Mr. Mayorkas hit pause after a botched rollout that saw critics accusing him of Orwellian attempts to silence people who had competing views on issues of the day.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas had insisted that wasn't his goal. But the pick of Nina Jankowicz, who had a history of spreading dodgy information, to lead the board, as well as revelations that the board had been trying to coordinate directly with major tech companies had fatally damaged the secretary's plans.</p> <p>After his own Homeland Security Advisory Council voted unanimously to reject the idea of a board on Wednesday, Mr. Mayorkas put the final nail in it.</p> <p>"In accordance with the HSAC's prior recommendation, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas has terminated the Disinformation Governance Board and rescinded its charter effective today, August 24, 2022," the department said.</p> <p>The advisory council said that Homeland Security should play a role in combatting misinformation, but said it should build on what the department already does.</p> <p>The council, in a report led by Michael Chertoff, a former Homeland Security secretary in the Bush administration, and Jamie Gorelick, a former deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration, said a board wasn't needed to achieve those goals — and indeed, suggested the department might be straying too far from its mission.</p> <p>"They don't have a red pencil to correct everything in the world that's not true," Mr. Chertoff said as he and Ms. Gorelick revealed their final report to the advisory council.</p> <p>They said the department should be moving to combat information that affects Homeland Security's core missions. As examples, they said when smugglers try to lure new migrants to make the journey to the U.S., Customs and Border Protection has the responsibility to try to tamp down on that messaging, or when people post false information about emergency services amid a disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should try to correct the record.</p> <p>They said the word "disinformation" often sparks intense reactions, but Mr. Chertoff said "it was our sense that the actual work of the department has been exaggerated, and the real work is extremely straightforward."</p> <p>He and Ms. Gorelick said the department should follow basic principles of communicating what it's doing, making sure that's done in plain language and explaining to the public "the importance of truth."</p> <p>The report also urged the department's legal offices to take an active interest in what agencies are doing to make sure civil liberties are being respected.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas had said that was a chief goal of creating the disinformation board in the first place.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Online pro-US influence campaign removed
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/technology/facebook-twitter-influence-campaign.html

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter have removed an influence operation from their networks that promoted U.S. foreign policy interests abroad, according to a report on Wednesday by [researchers](#) from the Stanford Internet Observatory and the research company Graphika.

It was the first time that an influence campaign pushing U.S. interests abroad had been discovered and taken down from the social media platforms. The operation, which ran for almost five years on eight social networks and messaging apps, promoted the views, values and goals of the United States while attacking the interests of Russia, China, Iran and other countries, the researchers found.

The accounts behind the operation often posed as news outlets or took on the personas of people who didn't exist, posting content in at least seven languages, including Russian, Arabic and Urdu. The posts criticized countries like Russia for engaging in "imperialist wars" in Syria and Africa, while praising American aid efforts in Central Asia and Iraq.

Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, said the "country of origin" of the accounts was the United States, while Twitter said the "presumptive countries of origin" for the accounts were the United States and Britain, according to the report.

"It's the first time we've seen something like this," said Renée DiResta, research manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory. "It's the first time we've seen a pro-U.S. foreign influence operation taken down by Twitter and Meta."

Until Wednesday, influence operations backed by nation-states on social networks like Facebook and Twitter have been attributed mainly to Russia, China, Iran and other foreign adversaries of the United States. Russia pioneered many of these online disinformation tactics, using Facebook, Twitter and other social networks to spread divisive messaging among American voters in the 2016 presidential election. China has also used Facebook and Twitter to burnish its image and to undercut accusations of human rights abuses.

Researchers have long suspected that influence operations promoting U.S. interests abroad have been active, though no specific efforts had previously been documented and studied.

The U.S. government does not comment on covert programs. Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, said the agency "will look into and assess any information that Facebook or Twitter provides."

Twitter and Meta, which do not permit accounts that covertly work together to promote certain narratives, removed the accounts in July and August, according to the report. The other platforms that were used in the operation were Telegram, Google's YouTube, and the Russian social media networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki.

Twitter said it had no comment on the Stanford and Graphika report. Meta did not respond to requests for comment. While the companies have regularly revealed influence operations they remove from their platforms, they have not published a report on the pro-U.S. campaign.

The only U.S. operations that Meta has previously named were domestic efforts, such as when the company revealed in October 2020 that a marketing firm, Rally Forge, was working with the conservative organization Turning Point USA to target Americans.

In an email, YouTube said it had terminated several channels posting in Arabic, Farsi and Russian to promote U.S. foreign affairs, including channels linked to a U.S. consulting firm, as part of an investigation into coordinated influence operations. It said its findings were similar to those in the Stanford and Graphika report.

Ms. DiResta said the tactics used in the pro-U.S. influence campaign resembled those used by China. While Russia often seeks to sow divisions in its online campaigns, China is more focused on promoting a

rosy picture of life in the country, she said. With the pro-U.S. campaign, the goal was also “to show how awesome the U.S. was in comparison to the other countries,” she said.

The researchers were notified of the pro-U.S. online campaign by Meta and Twitter so they could analyze and study the activity, according to the report. The researchers found that the operation largely focused on messaging that favored the United States and the West through memes and false news stories, while criticizing Russia, China and Iran.

The accounts tailored their language and messaging to different regions, the researchers said. In one effort, a group of 12 Twitter accounts, 10 Facebook pages, 15 Facebook profiles and 10 Instagram accounts were created between June 2020 and March 2022 to focus on Central Asia. Some pretended to be media outlets with names like Vostochnaya Pravda. At least one account posed as an individual using a doctored profile photo based on an image of the Puerto Rican actress Valeria Menendez.

Those accounts then posted about the food shortages caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in Central Asian countries and cheered on pro-Ukrainian protests in those places.

Another set of 21 Twitter accounts, six Instagram accounts, five Facebook profiles and two Facebook pages targeted Iranian audiences between November 2020 and June 2022, according to the report. Some of the personas used profile pictures that were likely created using artificial intelligence. Many tried to present themselves as real people by interspersing Iranian poetry and photos of Persian food between political messages.

Posts from the effort claimed that the Iranian government took food from its citizens to give to the Hezbollah militant group, or highlighted embarrassing moments for the country, such as a power outage that reportedly caused the Iranian chess team to lose an international online tournament.

On Facebook and Instagram, dozens of posts also negatively compared opportunities for Iranian women with those for women abroad. Other messages criticized Iran’s support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and claimed that the stance would invite economic repercussions for Iranians.

Another group of accounts focused on the Middle East, applauded efforts by the U.S. Agency for International Development in Iraq and discussed positive interactions between American troops and Syrian children.

The group of accounts that focused on Central Asian countries also mentioned U.S.A.I.D. 94 times on Twitter and 384 times on Facebook, while hailing Washington as a reliable economic partner that could help reduce the region’s dependence on Russia.

None of the campaigns reached a large audience. Most of the posts and tweets received a “handful” of likes or retweets, researchers noted, and only 19 percent of the covert accounts that were identified had over 1,000 followers.

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HEADLINE	08/25 Website tracks every plane in the sky
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/flightradar24-flight-tracking-website/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) — On an average day, more than 200,000 flights take off and land across the world. That includes commercial, cargo and charter planes -- which account for about half of the total -- as well as business jets, private aircraft, helicopters, air ambulances, government and military aircraft, drones, hot air balloons and gliders.</p> <p>Most of them are equipped with a transponder, a device that communicates the aircraft's position and other flight data to air traffic control, and that signal can be captured with inexpensive receivers based on a technology called ADS-B, for Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast. That's what flight-tracking websites do in a nutshell, providing users with a real-time snapshot of everything that's in the sky (minus a few exceptions).</p>

That's now reaching far beyond aviation enthusiasts. When a US Air Force plane carrying House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [landed in Taiwan](#) in early August, over 700,000 people witnessed the event as it happened, via flight-tracking service [Flightradar24](#).

The plane, a military version of the Boeing 737 called C-40, departed from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia before embarking on a circuitous path to Taiwan, in order to avoid encounters with the Chinese military, adding hours of flight time. That didn't make it immediately obvious what the final destination would be, sparking online conversations as the plane slowly veered north towards the island. As a result, it was the most tracked flight of all time on Flightradar24, with 2.92 million people following at least a portion of the seven-hour journey.

The website, part of a group of popular flight-tracking services along with FlightAware and Plane Finder, was founded in Sweden in 2006 "completely by accident," says FlightRadar24's director of communications, Ian Petchenik, as a way to drive traffic to a flight price comparison service.

It first gathered global recognition in 2010, when the eruption of an Icelandic volcano [grounded thousands of flights](#) and attracted four million visitors: "That was certainly our first foray into international events, and how displaying air traffic to the public in real time could influence how people were thinking about world news," says Petchenik. "The number of visitors we received would have crashed the website, so our saving grace was that there was nothing to show but a hole."

Interest on the rise

Before Pelosi's flight, the record for the most tracked flight on Flightradar24 belonged to Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's return trip to Russia, where he was due to be imprisoned. The January 2021 flight was tracked by 550,000 people, beating an earlier record set in April 2020, when almost 200,000 users watched a Boeing 777 draw the crescent and star symbols of the Turkish national flag in the skies above Ankara, to celebrate Turkey's 100th anniversary of sovereignty.

Before then, in September 2017, thousands had watched a brave Delta Boeing 737 fly right into hurricane Irma to land in Puerto Rico, and take off 40 minutes later for JFK by carefully positioning itself in the gaps between the hurricane's arms.

Outside of major events, however, the number of people tracking flights is constantly on the rise: "We see a lot of people using the site to track a loved one, track their own flight, or find the incoming flight that they're going to be on later that day, to make sure the plane's coming," says Petchenik.

"Another use case are folks who are very interested in aviation, or really like to follow certain types of aircraft. They can also go to the airport, pull up the app and see what's coming. Then you have people who are professionally invested in the aviation industry, because they own an aircraft and they rented it out, or because they have a fleet of aircraft and they want to keep tabs on them. Finally, there are people who are professionally invested in having a lot of flight data. This is airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturers that are using large data sets to gain industry insights."

How data is harvested

To gather the data, Flightradar has built its own network of ADS-B receivers, which they now say is the largest in the world at about 34,000 units, covering even remote areas like Antarctica.

About a quarter of the receivers were built by Flightradar24 itself, but the majority are assembled by enthusiasts who provide the data on a voluntary basis. Because building a receiver is relatively cheap -- components cost about \$100 altogether -- many have signed up since Flightradar24 started opening up its network to the public in 2009.

A dense array of receivers is essential to track flights globally, but there's an obvious issue with oceans, where the network becomes sparse. So how do you get coverage over open water?

"By finding islands wherever we can and making sure that we have receivers there," says Petchenik. "But more recently we've turned to satellite based ADS-B receivers, to be able to better track aircraft over the ocean. However, the most predominant source of data is still our own terrestrial network."

Having such a granular and localized amount of data can be useful to get an early insight into emergencies and accidents: "We store everything that comes into our servers and if necessary we can go back into a specific receiver and extract the raw data. That's usually done only if there's been an accident or if we have a request from an air navigation service provider or an accident investigation branch," says Petchenik.

Occasionally, the data can reveal the cause of a crash before an official investigation does. In the case of [Germanwings Flight 9525](#), which was deliberately flown into a mountain by the co-pilot on March 24, 2015, the data suggested a very clear picture: "One of the parameters that comes across in the fullest set of data, which we received in the case of the Germanwings flight, is something called MCP ALT -- that's the knob that is turned to tell the aircraft's autopilot what altitude to fly at. Looking at the data on that aircraft, that altitude value was set to zero."

Not all data is available for every aircraft, however, as that depends on the type of transponders and receivers involved.

Aircraft owners or operators can also decide to prevent their data from being publicly displayed, most commonly for military, government or private planes. For example, they can sign up to a program such as LADD, for "Limiting Aircraft Data Displayed," which is maintained by the Federal Aviation Administration: "We abide by that list," says Petchenik.

"It allows operators to have their data displayed differently, anonymously or, in some instances, not displayed at all. Out of the total number of aircraft that we track on a daily basis, about 3% have some type of data display regulation."

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	08/25 Trial: rare jihadist attack in Switzerland
SOURCE	https://www.barrons.com/news/woman-on-trial-over-rare-jihadist-attack-in-switzerland-01661407207?tesla=y
GIST	<p>In a rare case of alleged Islamist "terrorism" in Switzerland, a woman will go on trial next week over a brutal knife attack on two shoppers at an upscale department store.</p> <p>The woman, who cannot be named, allegedly tried to slit the throats of two women shopping at the Manor store in Lugano, in Switzerland's southern, Italian-speaking Ticino region on November 24, 2020.</p> <p>The defendant, 28 at the time, is suspected of committing a "jihadist knife attack" and had "intended to kill her victims and to commit a terrorist act on behalf of IS" (the Islamic State group), the attorney general's office said earlier this year.</p> <p>When her trial opens at the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona, near Lugano, on Monday, she will face charges of attempted murder and violating laws against association with Al-Qaeda, IS and related groups.</p> <p>On the day of the attack, the woman is accused of having gone to Manor's kitchen supply division on the fifth floor, picked out a large bread knife, and approached a random woman standing nearby.</p> <p>Grabbing her from behind, the assailant plunged the knife at least 10 centimetres (3.9 inches) into her throat, missing her main carotid artery "by a few millimetres", the indictment said.</p>

As she screamed "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) and "I will avenge the Prophet Mohammed", she struck the victim to the ground, and then moved on to a second woman, stabbing the knife towards her face and shouting "I am here for IS".

The second woman suffered defensive wounds to her right hand, but managed with help from others to overpower her attacker and hold her until police arrived.

"The suspect acted wilfully and with particular ruthlessness," prosecutors said, maintaining that she had acted "with the aim of killing (her victims) and thereby spreading terror throughout the population on behalf of the 'Islamic State'."

Police quickly discovered the alleged assailant had been linked to a 2017 jihadism investigation.

After "falling in love" over social media with a jihadist fighter in Syria, she had attempted in 2017 to travel to the war-torn country to meet him, but was stopped by Turkish authorities at the Syrian border and sent back to Switzerland, it is alleged.

Upon her return, she was deemed to have mental health problems. She was admitted to a psychiatric clinic and fell off the security police radar until the attack three years later, police said.

The alleged assailant had reportedly once been married to a Muslim asylum seeker and had converted to Islam.

The trial is expected to last through September 5, followed by a verdict two weeks later.

Experts said next week's trial marks a rare event, pointing out that such attacks are almost unheard of in the wealthy Alpine country.

Switzerland has never experienced a large-scale terror attack, though it did suffer two other individual knife attacks in 2020 by people with suspected jihadist ties.

"In Switzerland, it's been very random and very rare that we have people that conduct terrorist attacks," Christina Schori Liang, a terrorism expert at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, told AFP.

It is even rarer that the alleged jihadist attacker is a woman.

"IS has never claimed an attack carried out by a woman," Damien Ferre, founder of the Jihad Analytics group which analyses global and cyber jihad, told AFP.

While there were reports of women carrying out attacks in the battle for Mosul in Iraq in 2004, he stressed that "it was never proven and the group did not communicate about it."

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HEADLINE	08/24 Guilt, grief endure: Kabul airport disaster
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/24/kabul-airport-bombing-afghanistan-evacuation/
GIST	<p>From a guard tower overlooking Kabul's airport, two U.S. Marines spotted a man matching the description of a suspected suicide bomber. They radioed their commanders: "Do we have permission to engage?"</p> <p>Request denied, one of the Marines, Sgt. Tyler Vargas-Andrews, recalled being told. Too many civilians nearby.</p> <p>The man vanished from view among a crush of people clamoring outside the airport's Abbey Gate, he said. It was Aug. 26, 2021. Hours later, an explosion ripped through the crowd, killing an estimated 170 Afghans along with 13 U.S. troops.</p>

Vargas-Andrews contends that “unfortunately, a lot of people died” because he was directed to stand down. “That’s a hard thing to deal with,” he said. “You know, that’s something that, honestly, eats at me every single day.”

The 24-year-old, from Folsom, Calif., climbed down from the tower a short time before the explosion went off and suffered catastrophic wounds in the blast. He has undergone 43 surgeries since, losing his right arm, left leg, left kidney, and parts of his intestines and colon. At least 15 metal fragments remain embedded in his body, he said, silent reminders of the day he almost died.

It’s unclear if the [bombing at Abbey Gate](#) could have been averted. The event was a low point in the United States’ exit from Afghanistan and the treacherous operation that began when Taliban foot soldiers swept into the capital 11 days prior. For the American military personnel involved, much of their experience throughout those two weeks is still coming into focus now, a year later, as they process the suffering they witnessed, and cope with lasting feelings of anger, guilt and grief.

This account of the deployment and the attack, [carried out by an Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan](#), is based on interviews with 14 service members involved, including the top military commander who planned and directed the operation.

As part of this project, The Washington Post produced [a companion episode](#) of its podcast, “Post Reports,” where listeners will hear directly from the U.S. troops who shared their recollections of these events. In blunt, often visceral detail, those who survived the final days of America’s longest war made clear that what endures is an incalculable sense of loss.

The commander, Marine Gen. Kenneth “Frank” McKenzie, said that he, too, continues to process what occurred, and regrets both the Abbey Gate bombing and [a drone strike](#) U.S. forces carried out three days later near the airport, killing 10 civilians. U.S. troops involved mistakenly believed they were targeting another suicide bomber, the Pentagon later concluded.

“We all feel bitterly what happened at the end,” the general said.

Heart-pounding and heartbreaking

Nearly 6,000 U.S. service members were dispatched to Afghanistan as Kabul fell, in what would be the greatest test of the Pentagon’s emergency-evacuation planning since the Vietnam War’s devastating conclusion decades earlier. Nearly [125,000 people were rescued](#) over 17 days. But tens of thousands more were stranded, [many with no clear path to be reunited with family](#) in the United States.

For many of the troops rushed to Hamid Karzai International Airport — named for Afghanistan’s first leader after U.S. forces ousted the Taliban from power as vengeance for quartering the terrorist group responsible for 9/11 — it was their first taste of a war that, after nearly 20 years, already was lost.

The sudden crisis undercut President Biden’s promise of a “safe and orderly” withdrawal, and prompted McKenzie to cut a deal with the Taliban in which coalition troops controlled Kabul’s airport while America’s longtime battlefield adversary pledged to maintain order outside.

U.S. personnel involved in the mission said the arrangement was exasperating, with militants beating and executing Afghans as they approached the airport. McKenzie described it as a strained but transactional relationship that provided U.S. troops with a measure of security from the Islamic State, which also is in conflict with the Taliban.

A Defense Department review of the operation, [first detailed by The Post in February](#), exposed sharp disagreements within the U.S. government over how to carry out the withdrawal. State Department officials wanted to keep the U.S. Embassy in Kabul open as long as possible, frustrating the military brass who wanted to begin the evacuation of American citizens and Afghan allies sooner.

Top commanders, including McKenzie, had advised Biden against withdrawing all U.S. forces from Afghanistan, preferring to keep a force of about 2,500 in place that would be reinforced by a similar number of coalition troops and backed by air power. But when the president announced in April 2021 that he wanted the military out by that September, the Pentagon began preparing for an evacuation.

A few hundred soldiers from the Army's 10th Mountain Division were positioned at the airport in spring of 2021 to maintain security in Kabul. They were intended to be a safety net as the administration, leery of Taliban gains elsewhere, had hoped to retain a diplomatic presence after the military withdrawal was complete.

The [Afghan government's collapse](#) on Aug. 15 triggered mass panic, leading tens of thousands of Afghans, many of them American allies who aided the war effort, to rush the airport. First Sgt. Andrew Kelly, of the 10th Mountain Division, said his unit tried but failed to prevent the chaos that unfolded as people, desperate to flee, swarmed the flight line and attempted to reach any aircraft they could find.

In the hysteria, Kelly and other U.S. soldiers responded to a report of gunshots at a traffic circle outside the airport's commercial terminal. As civilians scrambled for cover, a firefight broke out when gunmen brandished weapons at the Americans. U.S. soldiers killed three of them and wounded a fourth.

The small contingent of U.S. troops, linked arm-in-arm at times, attempted to hold back the masses. But the determined civilians broke through, with some boarding parked C-17 cargo planes without permission, and others climbing onto the outside of aircraft before takeoff only to fall to their death moments later.

"That's how desperate they were to get out of there," said Army 1st Lt. Timothy Williams. "It was one of those defining moments, I think, for everybody where it was just like, 'Wow, this is terrible.'"

As C-17s carrying American reinforcements touched down, Marines and soldiers were assigned to secure the airport's gates, and to assess, search and admit evacuees. It was heart-pounding, often heartbreaking work.

Among the units instructed to reopen Abbey Gate was the 1st Platoon of Ghost Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. Comprising less than 45 troops, it had been in Jordan serving as part of a crisis-response force when commanders ordered their departure for Kabul. The group was tightknit and had been training for months, said Gunnery Sgt. Jonathan Eby, the platoon sergeant.

Eby, a 17-year Marine with previous experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, said they formed a line and surged toward the crowd trying to move people backward. There was a writhing, anxious energy, he said, likening the crowd to a mosh pit.

"I would compare it to whatever Leonidas and his Spartans felt like trying to hold back all those people," Eby said, referring to the ancient Greek king and his warriors, who were vastly outnumbered in a famous battle depicted in the movie "300."

In the ensuing days, the Marines maintained a barricade at the gate, adjacent to a fetid drainage canal along the facility's southeastern edge. Many Afghans figured out that wading through the filth was the easiest way to bypass the crowd. Those flashing the requisite paperwork were hoisted to safety. U.S. troops carried out similar work at other entry points.

Teams of U.S. service women, formed on the fly in preparation for the evacuation, supplemented the mission by searching women and assisting children, hundreds of whom had reached the airport [without any parent or guardian](#), or wound up separated along the way.

Warrant Officer Sasha Savage, who led a team of eight women, said the effort never truly found a rhythm, but they assisted who they could. Photographs of her teammates [caring for babies](#) went viral online. It was clear that the evacuees were "going through the hardest time of their life," arriving dehydrated, bloody or scared because their families had been separated in the mayhem, she said.

“It feels like you’re making impact at that point,” Savage said.

To get around the airport, U.S. troops hot-wired baggage carts, forklifts and other vehicles. They pilfered tools found in shipping containers, figuring they might prove useful. Vargas-Andrews grabbed a pair of 18-inch bolt cutters.

At Abbey Gate, he and his scout-sniper teammates took turns scanning the crowd from the guard tower. Several times, he said, Marines interfacing with those hoping to flee retreated into the base of the tower to cry. The Taliban were posted at checkpoints just yards away, and watching them act so ruthlessly made it difficult to maintain restraint.

Vargas-Andrews recalled that after a few days of observing Taliban abuses, he crept closer to their checkpoints to photograph corpses nearby — people the militants had killed, he surmised. He relayed the images to commanders, he said, but understood there would be no recourse.

“If we start firing at them, they’re going to start firing at us. Do we want to get in that scenario?” he said. “I get it. But it’s a hard thing.”

A flash and then ‘Boom’

Fire from the explosion swallowed the tightly packed corridor outside Abbey Gate, ejecting ball bearings that cut down those closest to the epicenter and left a gruesome path of carnage. U.S. personnel manning the gate had been warned that a suicide bomber was likely to be nearby, but they had not received orders to suspend operations.

Asked about Vargas-Andrews’s contention that the bomber could have been killed before the explosion, McKenzie said that no request to do so reached his level or surfaced during a military investigation of the incident that included testimony from more than 100 U.S. personnel. Vargas-Andrews said he was never interviewed as part of that inquiry as he underwent numerous surgeries.

Eby, who also was at Abbey Gate when the bomb exploded, said that there was a “known threat” in the area, but he was unaware of any service member identifying the bomber. “All that was ever said was, ‘Look for a black bag,’ ” Eby said.

Shortly before the blast, Vargas-Andrews had climbed down from the tower to help people into the airport. He recalls seeing a flash. And then, “Boom — this massive wave of pressure just hit me,” he said.

“The next time I opened my eyes, I’m on the ground,” Vargas-Andrews recalled. To his left, a sea of people were down and lifeless.

The [military investigation](#), released earlier this year, determined the loss of life from the bombing was from a single catastrophic explosion. Some dispute that, though. Multiple personnel posted at Abbey Gate said they heard gunfire as well — and that they shot back.

Vargas-Andrews and others with him at the time remain convinced the bombing was part of a complex attack. As he lay in the dirt, his arm and leg shredded, the sound of gunfire crackling overhead urged him to seek cover, he said. There was a hole in the fence line about 70 yards away, but his wounds made it impossible to drag himself there.

Investigators concluded that gunfire was sporadic, and that those believing otherwise may have been disorientated by the explosion.

Those unharmed — or not incapacitated — scrambled to save as many lives as possible.

Among them was Marine Sgt. Wyatt Wilson, who sustained grievous shrapnel wounds in the blast and was thrown off his feet by its force. Despite his injuries, he tried to drag another severely wounded Marine

to safety, but he had lost too much blood. The woman Wilson tried to help, Cpl. Kelsee Lainhart, was left paralyzed by the explosion.

Teammates of Vargas-Andrews knew he was in trouble after the blast. Sgt. Charles Schilling, a close friend, raced to him, screaming Vargas-Andrews's name repeatedly. Using the bolt cutters his friend had commandeered, Schilling ripped open a hole in the fence to shorten the distance they'd need to traverse for medical care. The injured were whisked away on any vehicle available.

"Patients kept coming in five, six at a time," said Capt. Carlos Mendoza, an Air Force flight nurse who was working at the airport's hospital a few miles from the blast site. "It just didn't stop."

The wounded were splayed out on the floor waiting for care as doctors triaged them. Mendoza recalled encountering one service member who had died and another who was mortally wounded. Chaplains arrived and administered last rites.

A doctor split open the chest of one Marine using a pair of scissors as they searched for interior bleeding and then rushed him to surgery, Mendoza said.

"I heard that he survived," he added, though he is unsure.

Thirty-seven Marines were awarded Purple Hearts for injuries sustained in the attack, said Maj. Jordan Cochran, a spokesman. More than 300 received ribbons stipulating that they engaged in direct combat over the course of the evacuation.

In the Army, at least four soldiers have received Purple Hearts for injuries suffered in the evacuation, said Maj. Jackie Wren, a service spokeswoman. Nearly 330 soldiers were recognized for experiencing combat during those weeks.

About 45 U.S. troops were wounded in the bombing and survived, the Pentagon said. The Americans killed:

- Marine Lance Cpl. David Espinoza, 20.
- Marine Sgt. Nicole Gee, 23.
- Marine Staff Sgt. Darin Taylor Hoover, 31.
- Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, 23.
- Marine Cpl. Hunter Lopez, 22.
- Marine Lance Cpl. Dylan Merola, 20.
- Marine Lance Cpl. Rylee McCollum, 20.
- Marine Lance Cpl. Kareem Nikoui, 20.
- Marine Cpl. Daegan Page, 23.
- Marine Sgt. Johanny Rosario Pichardo, 25.
- Marine Cpl. Humberto Sanchez, 22.
- Marine Lance Cpl. Jared Schmitz, 20.
- Navy Hospitalman Maxton Soviak, 22.

The recovery

McKenzie, the commanding general, retired in April. He marvels at the courage and professionalism rank-and-file troops showed during the evacuation, and said his greatest fear was a bomber sneaking onto a plane and detonating in the air, killing hundreds of people.

Service members reflecting on the operation should "decouple their actions and their enormous courage on the ground" from decisions made by more senior U.S. officials that put them there, he said.

"If you're going to bring people in, you have to search them," he said. "You've got to be confident that you're not going to let someone with an explosive device get on an airplane because that is the point of greatest vulnerability."

Eby, the platoon sergeant, lost nine men in his unit, all 23 or younger. During an interview last month at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, he paused several times to regain composure while recounting stories about the fallen. He considers the surviving members of the platoon to be family.

“We are inseparable,” he said. “I still get called ‘Dad’ by most of them.”

Savage, who led a female search team, wears a black metal bracelet engraved with Gee’s name. The weightlifting enthusiast had been meritoriously promoted, and was among the Marines pictured caring for Afghan children.

“She had a certain light and happiness about her that would make things positive no matter the situation,” Savage said.

Vargas-Andrews said he hopes the military enhances its recognition of those who saved his life and the lives of others. He singled out Schilling, who tore open the fence, and Hospitalman 3rd Class Jorge Mayo, who raced among the blast victims and treated Vargas-Andrews.

A memory from a few days before the explosion sticks with the Marine, as he continues physical therapy at Walter Reed National Military Medical outside Washington. In the crowd at Abbey Gate, he spotted a sobbing girl in tattered clothes, maybe 8 years old. She held an infant in one arm and the hand of a boy about 4 years old in her other hand. The baby wasn’t breathing.

Vargas-Andrews said he hustled the infant, who was turning blue, to an Air Force medic, and they resuscitated the baby. But the girl continued to cry.

He scrambled to a higher perch on top of a vehicle, and spotted a man with his head in his hands. It was the children’s father. The man had paperwork needed to evacuate but had been separated from his children in the melee. Their family was reunited moments later.

Vargas-Andrews said the moment was “huge for me,” his voice thickening with emotion as he recalled it.

“I look at my injuries every day,” he said. “And that one family, they have a life now. And that’s something that won’t be taken away from them.”

He shifted his weight in his chair, a prosthetic leg beneath him.

“You know,” he said, “there were a lot of moments like that out there, and it makes it worth it. It makes all this worth it.”

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HEADLINE	08/24 US airstrikes against Iran-backed militants
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/us/politics/us-airstrike-syria-iran.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The United States military said it launched two airstrikes this week against militant groups linked to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in northeastern Syria, killing at least two fighters.</p> <p>The strikes followed a failed rocket attack on an American base this month. Militants launched two more on Wednesday — one of which wounded three U.S. service members, who were treated for minor injuries.</p> <p>The skirmish comes in the midst of talks between Iran and European diplomats hoping to renegotiate a deal that would limit Iran’s nuclear capabilities.</p> <p>“What the strikes last night illustrated is that our commitment to push back against Iran’s support for terrorism, militancy and the threats they engage in against our people in the region or elsewhere are not linked to wherever we end up on the nuclear deal,” Colin H. Kahl, the under secretary of defense for policy, told reporters in a briefing on Wednesday.</p>

The White House waited a week to strike back after an Aug. 15 rocket attack by Iran-backed fighters failed to cause damage or casualties at a base in northeastern Syria called Green Village. Military officials said they conducted the strikes in a manner calculated to minimize the risk of harming civilians.

In an attack late Tuesday night, American warplanes dropped guided bombs on bunkers containing ammunition and other military hardware in Deir al Zour, a city in eastern Syria, the United States Central Command announced in a statement. The bunkers were in use by groups affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the military said.

There were not believed to be any civilian casualties in the attack, which took place at 4 a.m. local time on Wednesday, according to a U.S. military official.

Central Command announced on Wednesday evening that it had launched a second airstrike on fighters linked to the Revolutionary Guards, following a rocket attack on Green Village as well as a second American base in northeast Syria called Conoco. Those rocket attacks began at 7:20 p.m. local time on Wednesday, resulting in three U.S. service members being wounded at Conoco. One service member was treated and returned to duty, according to a Central Command statement, and two others were being evaluated for “minor injuries.”

Mr. Kahl noted that the Biden administration was pursuing a restart of the nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, [which President Donald J. Trump abandoned in 2018](#).

“Whether the J.C.P.O.A. is reborn or not, it actually has nothing to do with our willingness and resolve to defend ourselves, and I think the strike last night was a pretty clear communication to the Iranians that these things are on different tracks,” he said.

Before the first retaliatory strike, American forces spent hundreds of hours surveilling a militant complex that contained 13 bunkers, according to an official who was not authorized to speak publicly about details of the operation.

Nine bunkers were attacked with one guided bomb each in that strike, the official said, resulting in one of the bunkers producing “significant secondary explosions” afterward. Military planners had believed that they could attack 11 of the bunkers without causing harm to civilians, the official said, but surveillance showed unidentified people near two of the bunkers in the hours before the strike, so they were taken off the target list.

In the second strike, American Apache helicopter gunships destroyed three vehicles as well as equipment used to launch some of the rockets, and killed two or three of the fighters believed to have carried out the rocket attacks, according to Central Command, which called the gunship strike “proportional and deliberate.”

“We are closely monitoring the situation,” [Gen. Michael E. Kurilla](#), the commander of Central Command, said in a statement after the second strike. “We have a total spectrum of capability to mitigate threats across the region, and we have every confidence in our ability to protect our troops and coalition partners from attacks.”

American troops have deployed to Syria regularly [since 2015](#) to combat the Islamic State. That has occasionally brought U.S. forces into conflict with Iranian-backed militants operating in the country.

President Biden [ordered a similar retaliatory airstrike](#) in February 2021 against Iranian-backed forces in Syria for attacking U.S. troops in Iraq.

American military leaders have expressed greater caution in how they approach such attacks since [a 2021 investigation by The New York Times](#) revealed that American airstrikes in Syria had produced far more

	civilian casualties than previously acknowledged, and spurred Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III to order the military to improve the way it processes reports of civilian harm.
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HEADLINE	08/25 Taliban claim body of AQ leader not found
SOURCE	https://denvergazette.com/news/nation-world/taliban-say-theyve-not-found-body-of-al-qaeda-leader/article_e2e69eb5-fcd3-5bd6-9e8c-41335a788e3a.html
GIST	<p>KABUL (Reuters) - The Taliban have not found the body of Ayman al-Zawahiri and are continuing investigations, group spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said on Thursday, after the United States said they killed the al Qaeda leader in an airstrike in Kabul last month.</p> <p>The United States killed Zawahiri with a missile fired from a drone while he stood on a balcony at his hideout in July, U.S. officials said, in the biggest blow to al Qaeda since U.S. Navy SEALs shot dead Osama bin Laden more than a decade ago.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Afghans at risk await evacuation, relocation
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/nato-sports-spain-kabul-68c8ade2739a90290339e9792af803ba
GIST	<p>BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — More than a year after the Taliban takeover that saw thousands of Afghans rushing to Kabul’s international airport amid the chaotic U.S. withdrawal, Afghans at risk who failed to get on evacuation flights say they are still struggling to find safe and legal ways out of the country.</p> <p>Among those left behind is a 49-year-old interpreter who worked for a NATO contractor in 2010 accompanying convoys in Kandahar. Only six days after the Taliban reached the capital last August, they came looking for him.</p> <p>“They come to my house and they threatened my son and my wife (when) I was not at home. They (then) destroy my office,” he told AP via WhatsApp referring to the place where he taught English. He asked that his name not be revealed for security reasons.</p> <p>This month, he was interrogated by the Taliban again for more than two hours.</p> <p>During the chaotic days of the U.S. pullout, he had tried several times to reach Kabul Airport but, like many, failed to get through massive crowds made even more dangerous by attacks around the airport that killed dozens. He then tried to leave Afghanistan by crossing the land border with Pakistan but was stopped by the Taliban who demanded \$700 per person to cross — money he did not have. To make matters worse, his passport is no longer valid.</p> <p>Like millions of Afghans, he’s also been impacted by the country’s economic freefall, caused in part by international sanctions and vanishing foreign aid.</p> <p>“We eat once a day,” the interpreter said. Still, he continues hoping he and his family will leave Afghanistan at some point.</p> <p>“I never give up because of my future and my children future,” he said.</p> <p>Since their return to rule, the Taliban have been trying to transition from insurgency and war to governing, with the hard-liners increasingly at odds with the pragmatists on how to run a country in the midst of a humanitarian and economic crisis. But a year on they have so far failed to gain international recognition. Initial promises to allow girls to return to school and women to continue working have been broken.</p> <p>Those who have failed to evacuate include interpreters and drivers but also women journalists, activists and athletes who say they cannot live freely under a Taliban-led government.</p>

The U.S., together with other Western nations, hastily evacuated more than 120,000 people, both foreign nationals and Afghan citizens, in August last year.

Some 46,000 Afghans who remained in the country after Aug. 31 have since applied for U.S. humanitarian parole, according to the Migration Policy Institute. But only 297 have been approved so far.

Because there is no longer a U.S. consulate in Afghanistan, asylum-seekers must make their way to other countries with consular services for in-person interviews.

The list of obstacles to getting out of Afghanistan is extensive, starting with the difficulty in obtaining passports as offices repeatedly close due to technical problems.

“Today, the vast majority of Afghans don’t have access to legal identity, meaning if they need tomorrow to be able to get to safety legally, they can’t,” said Nassim Majidi, co-founder and executive director of Samuel Hall, an independent think tank that conducts research on migration and displacement. Majidi was speaking at a seminar organized by the Migration Policy Institute looking at the situation of Afghans in Afghanistan and abroad a year after the withdrawal.

Around 2,000 Afghans and their families who worked with NATO, its agencies, and member countries were among those evacuated from Kabul according to the military alliance. But the evacuations were organized by individual member countries. NATO, as an organization, had no repatriation plan.

Evacuations from third countries are still happening, although sporadically. Earlier this month a plane carrying nearly 300 Afghans who had collaborated with the Spanish government landed in Madrid. Germany and France also have continued to work on evacuation cases, Majidi said.

But thousands of Afghans are still living in limbo in third countries including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kosovo and Albania while they wait for their applications to be processed for resettlement to the United States and Canada.

Though life-saving for many, the evacuations also fractured families. Among them is that of an Afghan journalist who asked to remain anonymous, fearing for the safety of her relatives in Kabul.

“It was really difficult to leave everything behind in an hour,” she told the Associated Press in a phone interview from her new home in Nijmegen, in the Netherlands, which she moved into after months of living in a temporary refugee shelter.

The government of the Netherlands had called her on Aug. 26 offering a single spot on an evacuation flight. Her relatives told her she needed to save herself first if she wanted to help them.

A year later, three of her family members have recently managed to get evacuated to France, she said. But despite repeated family reunification requests to the Netherlands and other European countries, the majority of her siblings remain in Kabul, living across the street from a police station now in Taliban hands.

On June 17 one of her older brothers was allegedly beaten to death by Taliban forces on the street after he was found carrying a photo of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance that fought the Taliban, she said.

Days later, she said, the men showed up at the family’s home and forced them to sign a death certificate that stated he had died of “natural causes.” The AP was unable to independently verify her claims.

With most of her family still in Afghanistan and many bureaucratic hurdles to face in the Netherlands, it has been difficult to start a new life, she said.

“Until now it is just darkness.”

HEADLINE	08/24 US troops injured by rocket attacks in Syria
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/three-u-s-troops-in-syria-suffer-minor-injuries-in-rocket-attacks-launched-by-the-suspected-iran-backed-militants/
GIST	<p>Three U.S. service members suffered minor injuries during coordinated attacks Wednesday by suspected Iranian-backed militants in northeast Syria, according to a statement from the Pentagon.</p> <p>The militants had launched rockets targeting U.S. forces at two locations in Syria. At Mission Support Site Conoco, one U.S. service member was treated for a minor injury and has already returned to duty, while two others are undergoing evaluation for minor injuries.</p> <p>The attack started around 7:20 p.m. local time in Syria when several rockets landed inside the perimeter of the Conoco site followed by more rockets near Mission Support Site Green Village.</p> <p>In response, the U.S. used attack helicopters to destroy three vehicles and equipment used to launch some of the attacks. According to initial assessments, two to three Iran-backed militants died during the U.S. counterattack.</p> <p>U.S. Central Command said in a statement, "The response was proportional and deliberate. The United States does not seek conflict with Iran, but we will continue to take the measures necessary to protect and defend our people."</p> <p>There are currently about 900 U.S. troops in Syria.</p> <p>The attack and the U.S. response come after the U.S. had launched airstrikes Tuesday in Syria destroying several ammunition and logistics bunkers used by militia groups backed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC.)</p> <p>Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Dr. Colin Kahl told reporters the U.S. strikes Tuesday had destroyed nine bunkers used by militia groups affiliated with the IRGC.</p> <p>Tuesday's airstrikes were in part a response to an attempted drone attack on U.S. forces in Syria on Aug. 15, which Kahl said had been coordinated against two U.S. facilities at one time. The drone parts that were collected afterwards were traced directly to Tehran.</p> <p>Kahl said the concern was that the Aug. 15 attack "might be an indication that Iran intends to do more of this, and we wanted to disabuse them of any sense that that was a good idea."</p> <p>He also said that the strikes showed that the U.S. commitment to defending its forces against Iranian-backed groups is unrelated to diplomatic efforts to revive the Iran Nuclear Deal. The U.S. on Wednesday responded to Iran's comments on the latest draft of the deal and indicated that while a deal is closer now than it was a couple of weeks ago, not every gap has been bridged.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	08/24 Dugong 'functionally extinct' in China
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/24/dugong-sea-mammal-extinct-china/
GIST	A giant, gentle sea creature that belongs to the manatee family is now "functionally extinct" in China with no sightings recorded since 2008, a new study said Wednesday.

The dugong, a strictly marine herbivorous mammal, is known to slowly roam the coasts of tropical and subtropical countries, [feeding on sea-grass beds](#) in shallow waters. They can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh more than 1,000 pounds.

But according to conservationists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the number of dugongs in waters near mainland China has dwindled significantly since 1970 — due in large part to human activity.

The scientists' [research was published](#) Wednesday in Britain's Royal Society of Open Science. In a press release announcing the findings, the report's authors said there are "strong indications that this is the first functional extinction of a large mammal in China's coastal waters," where they have been spotted for hundreds of years.

"Our new study shows strong evidence of the regional loss of another charismatic aquatic mammal species in China — sadly, once again driven by unsustainable human activity," said Samuel Turvey, a professor and researcher at ZSL's Institute of Zoology.

The authors recommended that the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which keeps a global conservation "[Red List](#)," reassess the dugong species' regional status as critically endangered (possibly extinct) across the entirety of Chinese waters.

Fishing, ship strikes and human-caused habitat loss were the main drivers of extinction, the authors said. Sea grass is a specific marine habitat that is being "rapidly degraded by human impacts," according to the release.

China has made sea-grass restoration and recovery efforts "a key conservation priority," but the researchers say the efforts may be too little too late.

"Dugongs stay in waters up to 10 meters and are constantly grazing," said Heidi Ma, a postdoctoral researcher at ZSL's Institute of Zoology and co-author of the report. "But there is a lot of competition for resources in these areas," she said, adding that seagrass contains a high level of carbon and is an essential source of food and shelter for fish.

Since 1988, China has classified the dugong as a "Grade 1 National Key Protected Animal," a designation that technically affords it the highest level of protection.

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HEADLINE	08/25 Covid aid to retrain veterans: 5% got jobs
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/25/covid-veterans-retraining-program-school/
GIST	<p>The offer to military veterans left unemployed by the coronavirus pandemic was tantalizing: A year of online courses courtesy of the federal government. Graduates would be set up for good jobs in high-demand fields from app development to graphic design.</p> <p>"I jumped at it," said Jacqueline Culbreth, 61, an Air Force veteran laid off in 2020 from her job as a construction estimator in Orlando. "I was looking forward basically to upping my earning power."</p> <p>But more than a year after enrolling at the Chicago-based Future Tech Career Institute, Culbreth is no closer to her goal of landing a job in cloud computing. Like many former service members enrolled at the for-profit trade school under a pandemic relief program run by the Department of Veterans Affairs, she soon found herself immersed in discouraging chaos.</p> <p>Schedules were disorganized and courses did not follow a set syllabus. School-provided laptops couldn't run critical software. And during long stretches of scheduled class time, students were left without instruction, according to interviews with Culbreth and 10 other veterans who attended the school.</p>

In February, VA cut off tuition payments to Future Tech, leaving Culbreth and more than 300 other veterans in the lurch.

The disarray at Future Tech is the most painful example of broader problems with the \$386 million [Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program](#), or VRRAP. Many schools proved unable to attract students or deliver promised services. In addition to Future Tech, nearly 90 schools have had their approvals yanked, according to VA officials, including several that were actively serving about 100 veterans. Some schools were cut off amid allegations of predatory practices, while others simply went out of business.

As of Aug. 1, only about 6,800 veterans had enrolled in the program, far fewer than the 17,250 Congress created it to serve, the agency said; just 397 had landed new jobs.

The story of VRRAP illustrates Washington's often losing battle to effectively spend the torrent of cash Congress threw at the coronavirus pandemic starting in March 2020. In all, lawmakers approved more than \$5 trillion for covid relief, an unprecedented wave of emergency loans, grants and other assistance intended to fight the virus and pull America out of its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. But haste and carelessness in crafting the aid created a wellspring for fraud and waste — a mess that hundreds of federal investigators are still trying to clean up.

In VRRAP's case, Congress bungled both the program's design and its timing, critics said, diminishing the likelihood of attracting students. As of last week, roughly half the money had been spent, leaving VA on track to return tens of millions of dollars to the U.S. Treasury when the program expires in December.

Lawmakers didn't address VA's long struggle to police for-profit schools that engage in deceptive practices, as they set up a program that attracted many for-profit entities. Future Tech had been barred from receiving VA tuition payments for several courses in 2012 after Illinois officials concluded that the school — then doing business under a different name — had submitted false reports and misled veterans. The school regained its eligibility in 2017, Future Tech said in a statement. Under VRRAP, it charged VA more than \$25,000 per student per year, according to a tuition statement seen by The Post — just under the federal cap of \$26,000 and about \$7,000 higher than other computer boot camps approved by the program.

Future Tech said the school saw “tremendous success” with the pandemic program. The company described its earlier loss of eligibility for VA funding as the result of “minor” violations that have since been resolved. Its tuition and fees for VRRAP were appropriate, the statement said, for a year-long, 18 hour-per-week program that includes a laptop, practice exams and vouchers to take certification exams.

Future Tech acknowledged that illness and supply-chain snarls caused by the pandemic disrupted some courses for some students, but said the impacts were limited. It castigated Illinois officials for moving too hastily to shut off VRRAP funds.

“This decision disrupted the training for more than 300 veterans when just a handful had issues that could and should have been dealt with individually,” the company said. “We will never know what could have been achieved.”

‘We wanted to help them’

The troubles with VRRAP were achingly predictable: A [similar program](#) rolled out in 2012 — the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, or VRAP — also failed to attract students and was widely regarded as a flop. Nonetheless, veterans advocates began pushing for another education benefit after the pandemic plunged the economy into free-fall, leaving many veterans unemployed.

Lawmakers did not include the program in the first covid aid package, the \$2-trillion Cares Act signed by President Donald Trump. Instead, they waited until 2021, adding it to the \$1.9-trillion American Rescue Plan Act signed by President Biden.

By then, VRRAP was a solution to a problem that no longer existed. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, veterans experienced a jobless rate of 6.5 percent, compared with 8 percent for nonveterans. By 2021, the unemployment rate among veterans had fallen to 4.4 percent. Last month, it stood at 2.7 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, hovering near record lows.

“We wanted this done sooner than it actually got passed. Now you have people saying, ‘Is it really needed? No one is using it,’ ” said Tom Porter, executive vice president for government relations for the nonpartisan Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which was involved in crafting the legislation.

James Ruhlman, VA’s deputy director for program management for education, acknowledged that the agency had a limited view of veteran unemployment during the pandemic. He said that even the Labor Department struggled to understand employment trends.

VA officials had other concerns about the program, which also provided students with a substantial monthly housing allowance, current and former agency officials said. In recent years, a swell of soldiers returning from the post-Sept. 11 conflicts have gotten an education using GI Bill benefits, and hundreds of schools have been vetted by state officials. But the VA inspector general also issued repeated warnings about duplications, delays and “financial risks” from the agency’s reliance on for-profit schools, including an emergency warning in 2018 that many states were [failing to properly monitor](#) the schools and getting poor oversight from VA.

To avoid repeating that troubled history, the agency structured tuition payments to be spread out, so the final check of three would be sent only after a student finds a job. But multiple schools with spotty track records that had qualified for other education programs got the green light to serve VRRAP students.

Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) publicized the Future Tech case after officials in Illinois investigated student complaints. “I don’t know if they did their due diligence,” he said of VA. “For-profit schools by and large are a fraud on the public, and the victims in this case are veterans, thinking that they were taking advantage of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic opportunity.”

Asked about the timing of the program, Durbin said lawmakers were rushing to respond to an emergency. “We didn’t know if this pandemic was going to last two months or two years or longer,” the senator said. “We saw some very vulnerable people who had served our country. We wanted to help them. We just went to the wrong place.”

There were other issues. The narrowly drawn legislation limited tuition support to veterans who were not eligible for other educational benefits and were not receiving unemployment insurance or enrolled in any other federal or state jobs program — which risked leaving very few eligible applicants.

Meanwhile, the Veterans Benefits Administration, which oversees employment and training programs, did little to market the initiative, according to congressional aides and veterans’ advocates.

“You would think something like that would be put out,” said Kevin Keller, an official with the Illinois Marine Corps League and other state veterans groups. “But the word never got out from VA.”

Some school administrators described a labyrinth of red tape as they tried to get paid or get questions answered, with emails languishing for months in no-reply inboxes at VA.

“Collectively, we feel like it was too big of a program [for VA] to quickly launch without understanding the space they were entering into,” said Alicia Boddy, chief operations and development officer at Code Platoon, a Chicago computer coding boot camp, who meets monthly with a group of other school administrators.

“Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong.”

A study in chaos

Future Tech grabbed an opportunity. Biden's signature on the legislation was barely dry when the school began trumpeting the new benefit to veterans. In one May 2021 email, the school advertised a "12-month program to fully utilize the 12 months of eligibility awarded you by VA."

Opened in 2006 as the Computer Training Institute of Chicago, the school operates from a high-rise office building across Michigan Avenue from the Art Institute of Chicago. In a 2012 [interview](#) with one of its alumni, then the host of a local TV show on technology, program director Paul Johnson touted the school's track record of connecting students with high-paying jobs.

"We network with the VA, we network with a number of different corporate organizations," Johnson said. In 2012, the school received approval from Illinois officials to provide VA-funded courses to veterans. (VA authorizes officials in each state to vet local educational institutions.) Within 10 months, however, the state had stripped Future Tech's eligibility for federal funding for the courses after concluding that administrators were submitting false reports and misleading veterans about costs.

Details of that decision were revealed after Johnson sued VA in federal court in 2013; the lawsuit was dismissed. In a statement, Future Tech said the 2012 violation "was regarding a statement on our website. The other violations mentioned were also minor. FTCTI has added several new leaders and staff and strengthened our oversight" and regained VA eligibility in 2017.

As the pandemic deepened, the school switched to an online format. Last year, Johnson changed its name to Future Tech Career Institute, according to Illinois business records, and began welcoming VRRAP students.

It didn't take long for dissatisfaction to settle in. "People were complaining to VA: 'Hey they're not teaching us,'" Culbreth recalled.

Promised a year of comprehensive training, many students said they found only disorganization as swelling enrollment outpaced instructors and administrative support.

"We literally didn't know what class we were taking next," said one veteran, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he did not want to be publicly associated with the school.

Tyra White, a former Air Force police officer now living in New Orleans, enrolled in Future Tech in June 2021 to study graphic design. She said students were continually added to her course on Adobe Creative Suite with no notice, taking the instructor off guard. Two other students in the course confirmed her account.

"We'd be in the middle of something, maybe in the third week of the program, and then someone would enter the program brand new and then just be thrown into the third week's content," White said. The instructor "would have to teach them on the break everything that was presented to us on week one."

Two days a week, students were assigned to "lab time," White said, when they were supposed to work independently with access to instructors to ask questions. But instructors were usually teaching an entirely different course and therefore unavailable, White said.

"The entire atmosphere while we were there was totally discouraging," White said. "It was so disorganized."

Even the promised laptops were a problem: In an email sent to Johnson that was reviewed by The Post, a student complained that some students had yet to receive their computers weeks into classes, while others had been given machines with insufficient memory.

In some cases, the school did not give students access to basic software programs, said Kenneth Bainey, a retired information technology professional based in Canada who teaches project management part-time at Future Tech.

“There were terrible issues with administration,” Bainey said. Textbooks “took a month to get,” he said, adding that he was forced to search for some chapters online.

Last week, Bainey placed blame on the students, saying some veterans were “terribly destructive.”

“They came to class, never did any assignments and expected certification,” he said. “We had to get rid of them, and then they complained.”

Future Tech blamed the chaos on the pandemic. “We did have some staffing challenges and online challenges — COVID made the world very difficult for all,” its statement said.

While illness caused staffing shortages that forced instructors to take on extra classes, this was done “for the shortest time possible,” the statement said. Book delays were “isolated cases, not the norm.” Like the problems with laptops, they were caused by “supply chain issues we are all sadly familiar with.”

Under VRRAP’s strict rules, students couldn’t switch schools without losing benefits. Many veterans complained bitterly to VA — and to Johnson, according to emails reviewed by The Post. By February, with rumors spreading that Future Tech might close, Johnson admonished students not to gossip, saying it could trigger “anxiety, PTSD or trauma.”

“Everything will work out,” he wrote in an email reviewed by The Post. “All of you will be fine.”

‘I’m so disappointed’

Three-and-a-half weeks later, VA cut off payments to Future Tech.

A VA claims processor in Muskogee, Okla., had become suspicious after spotting a tenfold spike in enrollment in December 2021, VA officials said. Years of experience suggested that exploding enrollment at a for-profit school could be a sign of trouble.

VA notified the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, which found serious problems at Future Tech, including missing instructors, changing course lengths, students forced to take night courses when they had requested a day schedule, instructors who lacked certifications, “substantial misrepresentations” and sloppy record-keeping, according to a [letter](#) sent to Johnson in February.

For Future Tech students, the decision abruptly cut off not only tuition payments but also a housing allowance of more than \$2,000 a month. Culbreth said she briefly was forced to live out of her car and in a homeless shelter.

Frustrated by the lack of instruction, Culbreth had joined other students in an independent study group and managed to earn specialized certification in cloud web services. But she had hoped to earn certification in three or four other areas. Today, she works as a project coordinator for a tech company, a less technical position that doesn’t pay enough to rent her own apartment, she said.

“I’m drowning here,” said Culbreth, who has been staying with a friend. “I’m so disappointed. I would have finished. I would have gotten my certifications. I wouldn’t have let anything stop me.”

The program’s disappointing showing has prompted two congressional hearings. In February, Rep. Mike Levin (D-Calif.), chairman of a House subcommittee focused on economic opportunity for veterans, pressed for data on education quality at for-profit schools and asked how VA defines “successful employment.” Program integration officer Ricardo DaSilva conceded that the agency does not study job retention.

In May, a senior VA Education Service official objected to Levin’s suggestion to boost enrollment by adding four-year colleges to VRRAP’s roster of schools, saying the change would cause “new

	<p>administrative burdens” months before the program expires. Levin fired back: “The status quo is entirely unacceptable.”</p> <p>A month later, Congress passed legislation authorizing VA to recover at least \$4.2 million in tuition and fees from schools whose approvals were pulled, including Future Tech. Nothing has yet been recovered, and Ruhlman said he is not confident anything will be.</p> <p>“I wouldn’t say it will be easy to get it back,” he said.</p> <p>Asked about the program’s failures, Ruhlman said “there are hurdles and a number of administrative problems to be solved in the rollout of any federal program.” He noted that VRRAP was created “in a very fairly short period of time.”</p> <p>In July, Future Tech changed its name yet again: It is now the Institute of Business and Technology Careers, according to Illinois business records. The school said it has been told by state officials that it could reapply for future VA programs.</p> <p>Ruhlman predicted VA officials would “put that application ... under extreme scrutiny.”</p> <p>“Given what has happened,” he said, “I would say that the bar would be fairly high.”</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Common on WA beaches: needles, plastic
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/study-reveals-most-common-things-on-washington-beaches-are-needles-plastic
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A new study by the University of Washington is revealing some of the shocking things being washed on shore, including needles. Now, a push is being made to get the trash out of our ocean.</p> <p>“We would like to see its natural beauty and it would be nice if it doesn’t come with trash,” said Scott Cheney, who’s visited Golden Gardens Park with his family from Utah. Cheney tells KOMO News his favorite thing to do when visiting Washington is going to the beach, but he does worry about what may be found on the shore.</p> <p>“My sister reminded me to wear my flip-flops because hypodermic needles can be found on the sand at times and I found that a bit alarming,” said Cheney.</p> <p>The new study by the University of Washington analyzed 843 beaches, which showed how trash moves along the Pacific Northwest. Much of the trash was found where large seaweed and wood is washed up.</p> <p>“What we found is beaches that had more piles of wood, so that woody debris that we often find in the outer coast of Washington had more rubbish trash trapped in that wood,” said Dr. Kathy Willis, a researcher at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization.</p> <p>Willis said the most common thing found on the beach is plastic, which is deadly to our wildlife.</p> <p>“We’ve found plastic in the guts of birds, seals, fish, and so many different marine life,” said Willis.</p> <p>For Cheney, our trash problem can be fixed with one simple solution.</p> <p>“Just as humans, when you’re going to someone’s house or someone else’s beach you leave it better than you found it,” he said.</p> <p>Now that researchers have a better understanding of where the trash is ending up, the goal of the study is to provide resources to programs to help with cleanup efforts includes adding more trash bins to our beaches.</p>

HEADLINE	08/24 Forest fires burn more trees than 20yrs ago
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/08/24/forest-fires-trees-burn/
GIST	<p>Forest fires today are burning nearly twice as many trees as they did just two decades ago, according to a study from the University of Maryland's Global Land Analysis and Discovery laboratory.</p> <p>The researchers found a typical forest fire season burns 7.4 million more acres than in 2001. Forest fires accounted for a quarter of tree loss globally in the last 20 years, according to a summation of the data produced by the World Resources Institute.</p> <p>In the U.S. this year alone, several large California wildfires have burned nearly 200,000 acres and killed at least four people, according to data from CalFire. One notable blaze threatened the country's oldest trees in Yosemite National Park, while the largest fire on the California-Oregon border killed at least four and burned more than 60,000 acres.</p> <p>In Europe, large wildfires have affected at least a dozen countries, burning over 1.4 million acres of land, according to reporting from Reuters. Large fires darkened skies in Portugal and France this summer, fed by a dry summer and temperatures that pushed above the century mark.</p> <p>Wildfires in the largely untamed wilderness of Russia's Siberian and Far East regions have scorched upward of 7.9 million acres of forest so far this year, according to the Moscow Times, blanketing several towns in toxic wildfire smoke. Parts of China are currently battling numerous wildfires in the midst of the country's worst heat wave since 1961.</p> <p>Warming temperatures from climate change are an important driver of worsening wildfire conditions globally. As the atmosphere becomes warmer, typically lush forests dry out and become more vulnerable to fires.</p> <p>Dried-out forests can act like tinderboxes, allowing fires to spiral out of control. Vast blazes release even more carbon-dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, contributing to further warming of the planet. The World Resources Institute refers to this cycle as the fire-climate feedback loop, and little can be done to slow it outside of dramatically lowering greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>A changing climate has caused boreal forests to ignite like never before. About 70% of all fire-driven tree loss over the past 20 years has occurred in these forests, which are in northern areas of the planet and warming at higher rates than other parts of the globe.</p> <p>In 2021 alone, 16.4 million acres of tree cover were lost in boreal forests, compared with just 3.9 million acres lost in tropical forests such as the Amazon, according to UMD's GLAD laboratory. In both cases, though, the loss of these trees and the thawing of permafrost threatens to release ancient stores of carbon, turning vast forests from climate-healthy carbon sinks into accidental polluters.</p> <p>In tropical forests, agriculture and growing deforestation have increased the risk of wildfires while also making the forests less resilient to blazes. The expansion of industry and agriculture into these previously untouched parts of the globe means that most fires in tropical rainforests are sparked by people, as opposed to being ignited naturally by lightning strikes.</p> <p>While the analysis shows fire-related tree loss in Brazil spiked in 2016 and has shrunk since, the number of trees lost to wildfires in the past five years is still many times higher than it was in the early years of the 21st century.</p> <p>The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2022 report found that each increment of additional warming will lead to more devastation and death from a variety of climate hazards, meaning that keeping temperatures even a tenth of a degree Celsius cooler could have a substantial impact.</p>

For boreal forests, keeping warming under 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit is critical. Scientists with the intergovernmental panel say some of the worst-case warming scenarios would lead to 15 years of greenhouse gas emissions being released from the massive stores of carbon in these regions, something that could be curbed if temperatures are kept below the threshold of 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

Humans can also change how they interact with forests — ending deforestation and limiting agricultural techniques such as slash and burn can help improve forest resilience, especially in the tropics. When conditions are hot and dry, experts say people should also avoid activity that can spark fires near forests, as even a small blaze can quickly grow out of control.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Jersey Shore water temps set new record
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/jersey-shore-water-temperatures-soar-into-the-80s-setting-a-record/ar-AA113oTG
GIST	<p>The water temperature off Atlantic City reached a record 83.8 degrees on the official government gauge Tuesday night, setting a record — and 28 degrees warmer than it was two weeks ago.</p> <p>The previous record, 83.3, was set Aug. 10, 2016, said Jim Eberwine, retired marine meteorologist at the National Weather Service Office in Mount Holly and now Absecon’s emergency management chief. The water-temperature data date to 1912.</p> <p>During “upwelling” events in late July and earlier this month, the toe-chilling waters dipped into the mid-50s — 55.8 on Aug. 10.</p> <p>The surf temperature at Atlantic City has since rebounded and then some. It hit the record 83.8 at 9:42 p.m. Tuesday, according to the NOAA gauge. At 10:20 Wednesday morning, it was 82.2, quite close to what it was off the northern Florida coast.</p> <p>The oceanic mood swings have everything to do with the winds, which recently have emphatically routed the conditions that had made the surf fit for a wet suit, said Paul Fitzsimmons, a lead meteorologist at the Mount Holly office.</p> <p>Persistent winds from the south that cooked the region with intense heat July into August had a chilling effect on the Jersey Shore surf.</p> <p>Working in tandem with the spin of the Earth, the Coriolis force, they drove the warm layers near the surface offshore, allowing the colder water below to replace them, said Michael Crowley, with the Rutgers University Center for Ocean Observing Leadership.</p> <p>Since early Tuesday, winds have been blowing from a more northerly direction, and that has had a “downwelling” effect, he said, driving the warmer water back toward the shore. Because of that Coriolis force, the waters moved at a 90-degree angle to the right of the wind direction.</p> <p>And plenty of warm water has been available.</p> <p>Fitzsimmons said that the upwelling along the Jersey Shore was a regional effect. “When the temperatures were cold, they were still quite warm in other places,” he said.</p> <p>The career of the water temperatures the rest of the week is up in the air, given the uncertainty of the wind forecasts, said Crowley. “There’s no consistency the next five days,” he said.</p> <p>Warm surf temperatures aren’t unusual in late August. “This is the time of the year when the water temperatures are at the highest,” Fitzsimmons said.</p> <p>But not <i>this</i> high.</p>

HEADLINE	08/24 Cities 'heat islands'; expected to get worse
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/heat-islands-cities-extreme-temperatures-climate-change/
GIST	<p>This summer's deadly heat waves have left people throughout the U.S. and Europe desperate for relief. It's urban centers that have felt the intense temperatures the most — and where experts say it's only expected to get worse.</p> <p>That's because of something called the urban heat island effect.</p> <p>"Simply put, it means that urban centers are hotter than the surrounding suburban areas," Liv Yoon, a postdoctoral research scholar at Columbia University's Climate School, told CBS News. She explained that the effect is like a "dome overarching the city" that's created by carbon emissions, air getting trapped amid tall buildings, and a lack of open space and greenery, among other things.</p> <p>"All of that is building and building and it has nowhere to escape," she said.</p> <p>This dome effect can cascade over entire cities, although it also impacts specific neighborhoods within that urban area very differently. According to the recently launched heat.gov website, neighborhoods in the same city can have temperatures differing by roughly 15° to 20°F at the same time depending on their levels of tree cover and other factors.</p> <p>Pretty much every metropolitan area experiences this effect to some degree. About 85% of the U.S. population currently lives in metro areas, and the heat island effect is felt most intensely in New Orleans, New York City, Houston, San Francisco and Newark, New Jersey, according to a 2021 report by the nonprofit Climate Central.</p> <p>"Today, there are over 200 to 250 million people that experience temperatures of over 35°C [95°F] every summer, living in about 318 urban areas" across the U.S., environmental scientist and climate resilience specialist Deborah Brosnan said. "So, it's a lot of people experiencing it."</p> <p>Yoon, the heat island researcher, is part of a project participating in a nationwide campaign by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to "make heat visible." Teams in various U.S. cities — including Yoon's in New York City — have been tracking temperatures to show the impact of excessive heat and the heat island effect.</p> <p>A map of their findings in New York shows how by the afternoon and evening, the heat index is substantially higher in the neighborhoods of Washington Heights, Harlem and the South Bronx when compared to the Upper East Side, Central Park and the Upper West Side.</p> <p>"Within a city, just because there's a heat wave going on, no one's experiencing that the same exact way everywhere," Jeremy Hoffman, an environmental science professor and scientist at the Science Museum of Virginia, told CBS News.</p> <p>In his own research in Richmond, Hoffman's team found a 16°F difference between the coolest and warmest places — less than 3 miles apart — at the exact same time during a heat wave.</p> <p>The phenomenon isn't confined to summer heat waves. It's year-round.</p> <p>"Urban areas tend to be several degrees warmer than their outlying rural areas throughout the year," Hoffman said. "That tends to be actually kind of a good thing for our energy needs in the wintertime, but in the summertime ... when it's on our hottest days with the brightest sunshine, the least amount of wind and the least amount of cloud cover, these conditions tend to become the recipe for these extreme temperature difference to become the most stark."</p> <p>"Incompatible with human life"</p>

Ben Zaitchik, a professor of earth and planetary sciences at Johns Hopkins University, told CBS News that urban heat lingers, and is usually maximized, at night. The sustained high temperatures prevent people from getting relief when their bodies desperately need it.

The negative impact extends beyond sheer discomfort. Areas with extreme and prolonged heat see increased [cases of kids](#) with asthma going to the emergency room, older adults with chronic lung issues having complications, and decreased worker productivity because of heat exhaustion, Zaitchik said. It can also be [deadly](#).

"There's a literal, physiological limit, which is that once you get above a certain threshold of temperature and humidity, you can't sweat," he said. The body's internal temperature is about 98.6°F, but without the ability to sweat, [the body can't cool down](#), and body temperature can rapidly increase to 106°F or more within 10 minutes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"At that point, you're really kind of incompatible with human life," he said.

According to the [CDC](#), high temperatures can lead to heart and lung complications, renal failure and kidney stones, and can even impact fetal health and lead to preterm birth.

Every year in the U.S., the heat causes an average of more than 700 deaths, more than 67,500 emergency department visits and more than 9,200 hospitalizations. Those who are Black or Native American have the [highest rates of death](#), according to CDC tracking from 2004 to 2018.

Yoon has seen these health issues in New York, where she specifically researches the [social inequities](#) associated with extreme heat. She said that areas with more extreme heat tend to see the most heat-related deaths and illnesses, and also tend to be communities with lower income that are historically [redlined](#).

Even in neighborhoods where the heat difference isn't necessarily drastic, the impact can be more intense because there are fewer buffers. On the Upper East Side, for example, Yoon found that more people are likely to have climate-controlled homes or offices and have jobs consistent with good quality health care. That's not the case just a few miles away in [the Bronx](#).

"People are supposed to seek refuge from the heat indoors," Yoon said. "But if you live in dilapidated housing or public housing, they're notorious for their lack of cooling infrastructure. You just have nowhere to go, so extreme heat becomes even more of a problem."

Most of those who live in the Bronx are people of color, according to the U.S. Census, and the issues the borough experiences with heat echo those in similar communities nationwide.

Brosnan said that areas of lower socioeconomic status and higher populations of people of color usually have "significantly higher" heat indexes. They also usually have more air pollution, fewer green spaces, are often closer to traffic or factories, and have less cooling infrastructure.

"If you're a single mother, if you're from a minority race, you are more likely to experience heat stress and to be affected by extreme heat or heat waves than people in more affluent or larger percentage White areas," she said. "And that's the real issue, is that the impact of rising temperatures is borne disproportionately by the poor and minorities and those who can least afford to pay for them."

"Very high level of danger"

Since 1970, [96% of the 246 locations](#) analyzed by Climate Central have seen increases in their average summer temperatures.

"Now versus just 50, 60 years ago," Hoffman said, "our summers are much hotter, much more intense."

The hotter temperatures are not just a danger to public health, but to [infrastructure](#) as well, he said. It's particularly noticeable in regions that were historically cooler but over the past few years have been sweltering under unprecedented heat.

"There is a very high level of danger right now, for vulnerable groups in particular," Weather Channel meteorologist Carl Parker told CBS News.

When last year's [Pacific Northwest heat wave](#) hit, he said as an example, only two-thirds of households in the region had air conditioning. As of 2020, 12% of U.S. households [didn't have air conditioning](#), according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and of those who do, just 66% have central AC. Described by the National Weather Service as "[oppressive and unprecedented heat](#)," the wave brought record-breaking temperatures to the region, resulting in [buckled highways](#) and numerous deaths.

That area was among many that experienced yet another [deadly surge](#) in heat this summer.

"Now, suddenly, you're looking at days on end with temperatures above 100 degrees," Parker said. "That's when it gets really dangerous, when you don't have this sort of built-in infrastructure. And then even when you do have this infrastructure, sometimes it will fail."

"Roads begin to buckle," Hoffman said. "[Airlines can't operate](#) because they're unable to take off in such warm air."

"We see things like rolling blackouts," he added, "because so many people are needing to push their air conditioning beyond what they're kind of used to dealing with."

And when the infrastructure crumbles, it only compounds on the existing issues, Zaitchik said, pointing to last August's [deadly Hurricane Ida](#), a Category 4 storm that trampled numerous states.

"When you look at New Orleans, where it hit landfall, the heat killed more people than the storm itself," he said, "because the storm [knocked out power](#) and then it got really hot and then people died."

"No city is immune"

The past few years have shown that excessive heat is a nationwide — and global — issue. Utah residents recently had more than two weeks straight of triple-digit temperatures, and last month, the U.K. hit its [hottest day on record](#) at more than 104°F.

"No city is immune to this," Yoon said. "...It's becoming more of a problem. One, temperatures are getting hotter, but two, more and more people are congregating in urban centers. So, it's becoming more of an issue everywhere."

Parker told CBS News that by mid-century, major cities such as Dallas, Oklahoma City, Tampa and New Orleans, will see a month or more with heat index values of 105°F or greater. That's less than 30 years from now. And these urban areas, where the heat is most intense, are only growing.

"As bad as it will be, in general, it's going to be that much worse in these urban areas. ... By the middle of the century, somewhere between 60 and 70% of the world's population will be in urban areas," Parker said. "... And that's gonna mean a lot of dangerous weather for millions and millions of people."

Population density will only add to the heat. And a recent report by the nonprofit research firm First Street Foundation found that a "heat belt" will soon emerge in the U.S., stretching from the Gulf Coast to Chicago and encompassing nearly [one-third of U.S. adults](#).

"We're already operating on a knife's edge in a lot of ways," Parker said. "... So the big question will be adaptation — do city planners really start thinking about what they need to do to make cities more livable as temperatures are rising?"

"Billions" will be exposed to hotter temperatures

Research from 2019 found that, within 30 years, the heat island effect will raise city temperatures about half of whatever they experience from climate change — and in some places, twice the amount. That means if a city's temperature increased by 2 degrees because of climate change, it can expect [an additional degree](#) of warming because of the heat island effect.

"This previously unexamined extra warming will expose billions of urban dwellers, primarily in the tropical global South, to greater extreme heat risks," the researchers said.

Minimizing greenhouse gas emissions is the primary way to reduce global warming as a whole. In July, President Biden announced [\\$2.3 billion](#) in funding to help in disaster response and expand home energy assistance and offshore wind opportunities. He also signed the Inflation Reduction Act, which provides almost [\\$400 billion](#) to fund energy and climate projects to help reduce carbon emissions by 40% in 2030.

But these actions will only work to help prevent more warming in the future; they won't erase the damage that's already been done. Experts say that means that the world must prepare for a new reality, and now.

"Unless cities can adapt ... we will reach a situation where, at least in some cities, some of the densest cities, that it will be unsafe for people to live there during the summer," Brosnan told CBS News.

Cities impacted by the urban heat island effect must develop three main components of heat resiliency, Brosnan said: more green spaces to provide shade and help absorb the heat; retrofit buildings to be more economical and efficient in keeping people cool during extreme heat; and finally, better assist communities during times of extreme heat by providing water, cooling centers, assistance and anything else residents might need to survive.

"It's a long-term investment and it's a cost," Brosnan said, noting that all of these things will require lots of money and manpower. "The benefit is in human survival."

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	08/24 Arrests: 5 militia members stormed Capitol
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/fbi-5-militia-members-charged-with-storming-capitol/
GIST	<p>Five Florida men affiliated with a militia group called “B Squad” have been arrested on charges that they joined a mob’s attack on the U.S. Capitol, disrupting Congress from certifying President Joe Biden’s 2020 electoral victory, federal authorities said Wednesday.</p> <p>“B Squad” members stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, while wearing riot gear and armed with metal batons, knives, chemical spray and walking sticks, according to an FBI agent’s affidavit. Group members joined the mob in a “heave-ho” push against police officers trying to secure a tunnel on the Lower West Terrace, the affidavit says.</p> <p>Officers ultimately repelled the mob after more than two hours of violence inside the tunnel. More than 100 police officers were injured at the Capitol on Jan. 6.</p> <p>The FBI says the five defendants charged together are self-identified adherents to the “Three Percenters” militia movement, which refers to the myth that only 3% of Americans fought in the Revolutionary War against the British. The men are members of a group called Guardians of Freedom and a subgroup called “B Squad,” according to an FBI agent’s affidavit.</p> <p>A criminal complaint charges four of the defendants with a felony count of interfering with a law enforcement officer during a civil disorder. They are Benjamin Cole, 38, of Leesburg; John Edward Crowley, 50, of Windermere; Brian Preller, 33, of Mount Dora; and Jonathan Rockholt, 38, of Palm Coast.</p>

They and a fifth defendant — Tyler Bensch, 20, of Casselberry — also are charged with misdemeanor counts of entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds and disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds.

Crowley, Rockholt and Bensch were arrested in Florida, where a federal magistrate judge ordered them released after their initial court appearances Wednesday. Attorneys for the three men didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Cole was arrested in Louisville, Kentucky. Court records didn't immediately list an attorney for him.

Preller was arrested in Hardwick, Vermont, and ordered released after his initial court appearance in Rutland. A lawyer for Preller declined to comment on the charges.

A flier sent to "B Squad" members two weeks before the riot advertised a "March for Trump" bus trip to Washington for the "Stop the Steal" rally on Jan. 6, according to the affidavit. It says the flier encouraged Guardians of Freedom members to "deploy" and help protect people at the rally, where then-President Donald Trump addressed a crowd of supporters.

A man identified by the FBI only as "B Leader" coordinated the group's travel from Florida to Washington and reserved a block of rooms at a hotel near Capitol. He, the five defendants charged in the complaint and approximately 40 other "B Squad" members stayed on the same floor of the hotel on the eve of the riot, the FBI says. "B Leader," who isn't one of the five arrested defendants, also spoke at a rally at Washington's Freedom Plaza on Jan. 5, 2021, according to the affidavit.

More than 850 people have been charged with federal crimes for their conduct on Jan. 6. The Justice Department says more than 260 defendants have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement at the Capitol.

Nearly 400 Capitol riot defendants have pleaded guilty or been convicted by a judge or jury after trials. More than 240 have been sentenced, with roughly half of them getting terms of incarceration ranging from seven days to over seven years.

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HEADLINE	08/24 D.C. area shooting: 2 killed, 3 injured
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/08/24/truxton-circle-multiple-people-shot/
GIST	<p>Two men were killed and three others were injured Wednesday afternoon when police said two assailants opened fire on a street in Northwest Washington's Truxton Circle neighborhood, a community that has struggled with crime for years.</p> <p>The shootings occurred shortly before 1 p.m. near O and North Capitol streets, an area which has seen gentrification alongside persistent gun violence.</p> <p>Ashan M. Benedict, the D.C. executive assistant police chief, said at least two shooters got out of a small black SUV and opened fire with semiautomatic pistols or rifles at people gathered near a residential building for seniors. He said the shooters then got back in the SUV, which headed west on O Street.</p> <p>Police said the two men were pronounced dead at the scene, while three others went on their own to hospitals and were being treated for their injuries. One man walking his dog said he heard up to 10 gunshots. The shooting closed streets, and a charter school went into lockdown on the first day of classes.</p> <p>The Truxton Circle area has long been plagued by crime. The neighborhood is situated in the blocks north of the intersection of New York Avenue and North Capitol Street, where a four-story, castle-</p>

shaped liquor store marks a recognizable spot for commuters and residents. The intersection is one of the city's busiest.

Benedict said Wednesday's shooting "might be drug related," but it was not immediately known if any of the victims had been targeted or were in any way involved in narcotics trafficking. Benedict described the area as a "constant problem for us."

"This appears to be an open-air drug market," he said at a news briefing.

Bradley Ashton Thomas, an attorney who has lived in Truxton Circle 31 years and raised his family there, said the neighborhood has experienced "a steady improvement" over the years — with some homes valued at more than \$1 million. But quiet periods, he said, are followed by troubling bursts of violence.

Thomas, 68, an advisory neighborhood commissioner for the area, said people "hanging out" on streets is a continuing concern, as is "obvious drug dealing." When police patrol the area, he said, those loitering "move to a different corner or a different block."

"Then they'll come back," he said. "It's kind of a shell game."

At the scene, police crowded along the sidewalk in front of a residential building for seniors, where a black tent used to shroud homicide scenes had been placed.

In a phone interview, Benjamin Medrano, 27, said he was walking his dog near O and First streets when he heard about "eight to 10" bangs.

He said he thought it was construction until he noticed firetrucks racing toward the area. Medrano, who moved to the neighborhood a few months ago, said he was shocked by the number of shots he heard.

"I didn't think it would happen while I was walking my dog in the middle of the day," he said. "It's become clear we moved to a pretty dangerous area."

Medrano moved to the Truxton Circle neighborhood from Fairfax City. He said it was the first time he had ever heard gunshots.

D.C. Council member Kenyan R. McDuffie (D-Ward 5), who represents the area where the shooting occurred, called for police, prosecutors and judges to make sure the shooters are held "accountable." "These acts of violence need to have consequences associated with them," he said at the scene.

McDuffie said he had been around the corner on Saturday for a community event organized by Cure the Streets, a violence interruption program run by the Office of the Attorney General.

He said they had been handing out backpacks to neighborhood parents and children. "This neighborhood is one that all too often hears the sound of gun shots and sees yellow tape after acts of gun violence," he said, gesturing to the area that includes three schools. "I'm just really outraged."

The shooting occurred near Mundo Verde Bilingual Public Charter School, which was having its first day of classes when the shots rang out. The school has preschoolers as young as 3, as well as kindergarten through fifth-grade students.

Shortly after the shooting, children were seen playing outside the school, going down slides and pushing each other on swing sets as parents lingered nearby.

Tomeika Bowden, a spokeswoman for the D.C. Public Charter School Board, said police told her that the school was locked down for about 20 minutes before classes were dismissed.

	<p>Students return next week at D.C. public schools, though teachers have professional development this week.</p> <p>Olliebelle Green, 54, said in a telephone interview from a hospital that her son, 35-year-old Levon Williams, was among the wounded. She said he was shot in the side and was “coherent.”</p> <p>The area is near a fatal shooting that occurred hours earlier, on Florida Avenue NW, though police said they do not believe the two incidents are related. In that shooting, a man from Virginia was killed and a woman was injured.</p> <p>Before the fatal shootings on O Street, police said 136 people had been killed in the District this year, a 4 percent increase over this time in 2021. There have been at least three previous homicides in the Truxton Circle area this year.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Japan police chiefs resign; security lapses
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/25/japan-police-shinzo-abe-assassination/
GIST	<p>TOKYO — Top Japanese police officials said Thursday they would resign after an investigation identified security lapses at a political campaign event last month in which former prime minister Shinzo Abe was slain by a gunman who approached him from behind.</p> <p>Itaru Nakamura, the commissioner of Japan’s National Police Agency, took responsibility for the failures and announced his departure, marking a rare move by a national law enforcement official to step down in the aftermath of a local agency’s lapses. The cabinet is expected to accept Nakamura’s resignation Friday.</p> <p>Tomoaki Onizuka, chief of prefectural police in Nara, the city near Osaka where Abe was killed, also announced his resignation but did not say when it would be effective. Three other Nara police executives will face disciplinary measures, including a pay cut.</p> <p>The resignations underscored the depth of horror at Abe’s killing and its global reverberations. The shooting rocked a country with strict firearms laws where gun violence is almost unheard of. World leaders who had worked closely with Abe expressed shock at his assassination and praised his efforts over a long period to increase his country’s international influence.</p> <p>On July 8, a man wielding a crude, homemade gun fired two shots at Abe while he was stumping for a political candidate ahead of a national election. The bullets hit Abe in his neck area, near his chest, and he died of blood loss less than five hours after arriving at a hospital without vital signs.</p> <p>According to the National Police Agency’s investigative report released Thursday, Nara police officials had prepared a lax security plan ahead of the event and failed to properly guard Abe. Onizuka had previously said Nara police were informed of Abe’s appearance just a day before — shorter notice than usual for a campaign event. Onizuka had approved the security plan on the day of the event and had no concerns with it at the time.</p> <p>The investigation found problems with the plan that Onizuka approved and with security on the ground the day of the shooting. It found a member of the security team, tasked with guarding Abe from behind, was moved at the last minute to a different position. Ultimately, there was heavy security in front of Abe but no one to protect him from behind.</p> <p>“There were clear inadequacies in the security plan, and security personnel were not deployed properly, leading to a gap in security from behind,” the report read. “It was clear that there were security risks, but these risks were overlooked in the process of developing the security plan which was clearly inadequate.”</p> <p>The National Police Agency said it will now be more heavily involved in security plans prepared by local police forces and create a division tasked with vetting security plans for major public events.</p>

The suspect in Abe's killing, Tetsuya Yamagami of Nara, was arrested immediately on the scene. He [is now detained](#) and undergoing psychiatric evaluations until late November, when prosecutors will decide whether to press formal murder charges.

Yamagami, 41, told investigators he wanted to attack Abe because he believed Abe was connected to a group that destroyed his family financially. Police have not named the organization, but Yamagami's statements and other evidence suggest it was the Unification Church, which has confirmed that Yamagami's mother was a member and had made donations.

Abe, like many politicians, had appeared at Unification Church events as a guest speaker. His party, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has long enjoyed support from conservative-leaning members of the church.

Since Abe's shooting, LDP members have worked to distance themselves from the organization. But Japan's prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has faced plummeting poll numbers as he struggles to disentangle ties between the group and his party.

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HEADLINE	08/24 King Co. prosecutor to mayors about crime
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3607237/kc-prosecutor-record-straight-south-sound-mayors-link-office-rising-crime/
GIST	<p>King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg is laying out the facts for South Sound mayors who publicly criticized the office earlier this month as one of several factors to blame for rising violence and other crime.</p> <p>“The mayors of the South King County cities Auburn, Black Diamond, Enumclaw, Federal Way, Kent, Pacific, Renton, and Tukwila are united in our ongoing plea to our King County and Washington state criminal justice partners to help us stem the rising tide of crime and violence in our communities,” read the open letter. It was released to the media and signed by the mayors Aug. 4.</p> <p>“King County cities are seeing a disturbing rise in violent crime, as well as drug offenses and property crimes including auto thefts, burglaries, and robberies. Our community of residents, businesses, and visitors – the victims of these crimes – are fed up and action is necessary,” the letter continued.</p> <p>In addition to new laws limiting police pursuits and drug arrests alongside a county jail system that they contend routinely does not allow bookings, the mayors called out the prosecutor's office for being slow to file felony cases – if they are filed at all – and for deferring juvenile cases to hard to find and expensive restorative programs.</p> <p>In a letter responding to the mayors Monday, Satterberg acknowledged the concerns about rising crime and shootings across the region, but also noted this was not specific to King County, with many cities and the nation experiencing similar trends in crime in the wake of the pandemic.</p> <p>“We must also recognize that multiple factors contribute to crime rates: domestic violence, behavioral health disorders, the widespread availability of guns, population increases, substance abuse and addiction, and decreased police staffing, to name a few,” said Satterberg.</p> <p>Not only are the logistical challenges preventing cases from being tried, but the blame should also be shared with police departments themselves, which are having their own struggles with staffing officers to prevent crimes and gather evidence necessary in the criminal prosecution cases. He pointed out that prosecutors can only respond to police referrals.</p> <p>“Prosecutors cannot investigate crimes,” Satterberg said. “As a result, the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office can only charge felony cases that are first referred to us by law enforcement</p>

investigators. In that context, it is worth noting that felony referrals from your police departments dropped 28.5% between 2019 and 2021.”

Satterberg explained his office was prioritizing violent crimes and repeat property offenders, but stressed that doesn’t mean the office ignores other types of crime. He also provided a [link](#) to all of the charges his office filed in July.

On average, Satterberg said his office files 20 to 30 adult felony cases daily, with the majority involving violent offenses or repeat offenders (including property crime).

“Our deputy prosecutors are in the courthouse each day, working closely with detectives, including at night and on weekends, to draft and approve search warrants, help with case development, respond to homicide scenes, and attend autopsies,” Satterberg said. “Our deputy prosecutors are also trying cases every day. On the day of your statement, there were 10 felony trials in process in adult Superior Court. These trials included three murders, an attempted murder, three sexual assault cases, and a domestic violence arson.”

Beyond that, Satterberg points to the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects that it has had on the legal system. He pointed to the issues of having to transition to virtual courtrooms, issues in limited availability in trying these cases, and complications in communications between different parties, as well as the illness itself, as reasons why case resolution numbers have gone down.

“The Washington State Supreme Court, following public health guidelines, largely closed courts throughout the state during parts of the pandemic,” Satterberg said. “This included a lengthy suspension of jury trials and plea hearings ... Pre-pandemic, roughly 200 cases would be resolved annually by jury trials in King County Superior Court. This year, assuming there are no additional public health restrictions, we are hoping to reach 100 cases resolved by jury trial.”

While Washington is still recovering from the pandemic, it will continue to cause hiccups in the criminal legal system and how these cases are processed by the KCPO.

Overall, Satterberg stressed, the legal system is a collaborative process between lawmakers, law enforcement, and prosecutors, and no one side is responsible for the rising crime rates in the area. He wants to work together to move forward to make the whole community safer for everyone.

“We all share the goal of keeping our communities safe and we will always work in collaboration with you to protect public safety,” Satterberg said. “We are working to address the impacts of the pandemic and the rise in violence and we want to keep working collaboratively to address the most serious cases and prolific offenders.”

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HEADLINE	08/25 Report: Syria regime’s massacre at Daraya
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/25/ten-years-on-first-full-report-records-syrian-regimes-massacre-at-daraya-assad
GIST	<p>The “startling display of violence” meted out by Syrian government forces against civilians in the town of Daraya 10 years ago has been laid bare in the first detailed investigation into the massacre.</p> <p>At least 700 people were killed when forces loyal to president Bashar al-Assad stormed the town between 24 and 26 August 2012. Troops went door to door killing and detaining men, women and children. Terrified people sheltered in basements.</p> <p>To mark the 10th anniversary of the atrocity, a team of investigators from Syria, or of Syrian descent, backed by the Syrian British Consortium (SBC) advocacy group, tracked down survivors and witnesses scattered around the world to record and analyse their testimonies. Some of the investigators’ names have been changed for security reasons.</p>

The team hopes the [findings, published on Thursday](#), will be used by [UN bodies](#) and other legal institutions to prosecute some of those responsible.

“This report records the atrocities perpetrated in Daraya based on the testimony of witnesses and victims, thereby memorialising their accounts and maintaining a record for posterity,” said the report.

“It also showcases that despite the passage of 10 years and the collection of substantial evidence, accountability and justice continue to elude the people of Daraya. Despite their disappointment in the international system, witnesses provided their testimony, recounting the heinous crimes committed in Daraya by their own government, based on their belief that their story – their truth – is not only worthy of documentation, but may one day assist in bringing justice and accountability.”

At the time, the events in Daraya, a few miles from Damascus, were regarded as the worst single massacre of the civil war. Assad’s regime described it as a counter-terrorism operation. Internationally, it has gone largely undocumented, apart from a brief mention in a broader [UN report on Syria in 2013](#), which acknowledged government forces committed war crimes and said more investigation was required.

“We chose to investigate this massacre because it was the beginning of the unravelling of Daraya,” said Yasmine Nahlawi, a specialist in international law and atrocity prevention. “The army had engaged in skirmishes before, going into the city and shooting at demonstrators. But this was the first major event that led to a spiral of targeted campaigns against the city, further massacres, a siege and bombardments.”

Investigator Yafa Omar, who recalled hearing the bombardments from her house in the centre of Damascus, said: “If you allow these crimes to happen in Syria it will become the norm, and it will happen elsewhere.

“Syrians doing this paves the way for victims in other countries to use the same tools to pursue justice.”

In the days leading up to the massacre, witnesses, many of whom were being interviewed about events for the first time, said the Assad government and its allies indiscriminately shelled neighbourhoods across Daraya, killing and injuring civilians.

One witness stated: “The regime’s escalation against the city of Daraya began on the first or second day of Eid (19 or 20 August). The bombardments became worse than normal. There was mortar shelling and worse types of bombardments with weapons that we didn’t know, with new sounds.”

“We knew that our area’s turn came when the mortars stopped,” said another.

One witness told researchers the scene at the hospital after one attack was “horrific, like doomsday”.

“Everyone was looking for their loved ones, trying to get them treatment. People were running and hiding ... A lot of people were coming to the hospital. Everyone was screaming, saying, ‘Save this person or he will die.’ Entering the hospital meant that you were going to see people dying. I was only thinking about my brother ... [and whether he] was alive or not. The sight of blood was frightening. I still remember the people’s cries; everyone was calling the name of their loved one ... I remember wondering whether some people were dead or alive because they had stopped screaming.”

The report said investigators were able to identify government forces and Iranian and Hezbollah militias involved in the attacks by their uniforms, insignia and weaponry. The team also identified some individuals responsible.

The investigation also details how the massacre and its aftermath were the target of disinformation, including evidence that television reporters pressured gravely wounded civilians to bolster the state’s narrative that rebel forces were responsible for the killings.

	<p>Efforts to blur the facts of what happened “were almost worse than the massacre itself”, said investigator Ahmed Saied, who grew up in Daraya.</p> <p>Saied said documenting crimes that took place in his home town was hard. “You think that you are stronger and these stories are not affecting you, but sometimes you realise they are in subtle ways,” he said. All the researchers were offered counselling during the work.</p> <p>Mohamad Zarda, who lost his father, brother and cousin during the attack, said that giving testimony had provided an outlet for his traumatic memories. He added that he found comfort in speaking to other Syrians, who were better placed to understand what he experienced.</p> <p>“I think it’s important to have official documentation, an investigation saying that these groups are responsible and we can prove it. But the people of Daraya all know who was responsible,” he said.</p> <p>A recent trial in Germany saw a former Syrian officer convicted for crimes against humanity, but attempts to refer Syria to the international criminal court by the UN security council have been vetoed by Russia and China.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Report: 50,000 held in solitary confinement
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/24/us-solitary-confinement-prisons
GIST	<p>Almost 50,000 men and women are being held in prolonged solitary confinement in US prisons, in breach of minimum standards laid down by the United Nations which considers such isolation a form of torture.</p> <p>In a new report spearheaded by Yale Law School, the number of prisoners subjected to “restrictive housing”, as solitary is officially known, stood at between 41,000 and 48,000 in the summer of 2021. They were being held alone in cells the size of parking spaces, for 22 hours a day on average and for at least 15 days.</p> <p>Within that number, more than 6,000 prisoners have been held in isolation for over a year. They include almost a thousand people who have been held on their own in potentially damaging confined spaces for a decade or longer.</p> <p>The report, produced by Yale’s Arthur Liman Center together with the Correctional Leaders Association which represents directors of all prison systems, underlines the daunting mountain that the US has yet to climb if it is to combat a form of incarceration widely condemned as a human rights violation.</p> <p>Studies have shown that even short periods of solitary can bring on severe mental health problems including depression, aggression and suicidal thoughts.</p> <p>Its destructive harm was highlighted by the death earlier this month of Albert Woodfox who, before his release from Louisiana’s notorious Angola prison in 2016, was the longest-standing solitary confinement inmate in the country. He was cooped up for 43 years almost without break in a 6ft by 9ft cell.</p> <p>In his 2019 book Solitary, Woodfox described the impact of decades of isolation on him. He had regular terrifying bouts of claustrophobia which forced him to sleep sitting up to avoid the sensation of the walls closing in on him.</p> <p>The new solitary study, Time-In-Cell: A 2021 Snapshot of Restrictive Housing, extrapolates its findings from the reported figures of 34 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Though it finds that levels of solitary remain shockingly high, it also stresses that the figures are moving in the right direction.</p> <p>When the researchers began the series of annual snapshots in 2014 the number of prisoners trapped in isolation was almost twice today’s level, at between 80,000 to 100,000. Since then the graph has steadily declined, with a growing number of states introducing new laws to restrict or even ban the practice.</p>

“In the 1980s people promoted solitary confinement as a way to deal with violence in prisons,” said Judith Resnik, Yale’s Arthur Liman professor of law. “It is now seen as a problem itself that needs to be solved.”

California, a state with a dark history of abusive solitary confinement, is currently debating new legislation. The [California Mandela Act](#) would require every custodial institution in the state to impose strict rules and reporting, and would ban solitary for pregnant women, people under 26 or over 59, and those with mental or physical disabilities.

Last year New York state [passed similar legislation](#), joining a growing list. The Yale study finds that three states – Delaware, North Dakota and Vermont – reported having no inmates in such confinement in 2021, and two other states said they had fewer than 10 people.

Despite such optimistic signs, restrictive housing continues to inflict untold suffering on thousands of men and women. John Thompson, who spent more than a third of his 37 years in prison in solitary for largely minor infractions, described recently in the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) how it “chipped away at my positive attitude, my patience, and my personality”.

He spent sometimes years on end in a tiny cell prohibited from talking to anybody else and “with the fluorescent lightbulbs shining on me at nearly all hours of the day so that I could be surveilled”.

The Yale report highlights several areas of ongoing concern. More than 1,000 people with “serious mental illness” are still being held in isolation.

Black women are also disproportionately targeted. Some 30% of those in restrictive housing in women’s prisons are African American compared with 20% of the overall prison population.

“Isolation is used less frequently in women’s prisons, but the women who suffer the most are Black women,” Resnik said.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Arrests: 14yr-olds in pot shop robbery
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/group-of-14-year-olds-arrested-for-pot-shop-robbery-in-oak-harbor
GIST	<p>OAK HARBOR, Wash. - Three 14-year-olds have been arrested in connection with an armed robbery of a pot shop in Oak Harbor, deputies said.</p> <p>According to the Oak Harbor Police Department, The Green Room pot shop was broken into on Aug. 16 at 2:30 a.m., setting off alarms and prompting a call to officers.</p> <p>When officers arrived, four suspects wearing masks started leaving through a smashed front door.</p> <p>An officer yelled commands at the suspects with her gun drawn. Two complied and two ran, police said. Additional officers who arrived were able to take one of the fleeing suspects into custody.</p> <p>Marijuana and other pot products were found inside two bags that the teens carried out of the store when they were caught, according to Oak Harbor police.</p> <p>The teens are suspected in at least two other burglaries, police said.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/24 Tacoma crime data: year-to-date increase
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/new-tacoma-crime-data-shows-year-to-date-increase
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Recent weekly crime data from Tacoma Police based on data from Aug. 8 to Aug. 14 shows year-to-date increases in almost every crime tracked by police in the first eight months of the year.</p>

One of those locations with an increase is the Hilltop neighborhood, a community Thrett Brown works in. Brown leads the organization 'Young Business Men of Washington,' which works to help youth and he said city leaders need to start paying more attention to young adults.

"Community opportunities for resources in young adults in the community that are considered problematic. There's no funding stressed enough on those issues," Brown said.

It is in this same neighborhood where last month, 14-year-old Iyana Ussery was shot and killed after she was hit by a bullet while riding in a car. Two 17-year-old boys, Christopher Anthony P Felizardo and Jeremiah Anthony Greg Averitt, have been accused in her death.

Police data from Sector 1, locations in the Hilltop community and neighboring areas (Upper Tacoma, Downtown Tacoma, Port of Tacoma/Tide Flats and Northeast Tacoma/Browns Point) show increases.

When comparing January-August 14, 2021 to January-August 14, of 2022: homicides were up 50 percent, burglaries were up more than 75 percent and motor vehicle thefts were up more than 104 percent, among other crimes.

The data divides the city into four sectors. Sectors 2 through 4 also showed similar year-to-date increases.

"Honestly I think it'll be predominantly the same cycle until community are more involved," Brown said, "when you can start investing in community, then you don't have as much crime."

The report does state that in the last 28 days (July 18, 2022- August 14, 2022) certain criminal offenses in some parts of town have decreased.

Brett Johnson, a Tacoma business owner and the president of the grassroots community organization 'Tacoma Pierce County Safe,' which looks to address crime, said more coordination is needed between city, county, state officials and policies.

"We're getting movement in the right direction, but it's not in a coordinated effort and there are jurisdictional issues that are causing problems for each other," Johnson said, "for example, Tacoma Police has a staffing issue, which is a city of Tacoma issue. Whether, or not we can arrest people, is a jail issue and a prosecutor issue, which is a county issue. Some of the rules of pursuit and apprehension, a state issue," Johnson added, "and there's no coordination between all of those and we're trying to thread that needle and get everybody on the same page."

He had this message for local leaders: "Please get together. Work with the different jurisdictions. Get the solutions beyond your jurisdiction, represent us. Represent us and get us results."

The increases shown in this new report, come one month after Tacoma Police Chief Avery Moore released a plan to curb crime: <https://komonews.com/news-brief-newsletter/amid-spate-of-recent-mass-shootings-tacoma-police-chief-presents-plan-to-curb-crime>

There is a community involvement component in the plan. Wednesday, KOMO asked the police department if they would update on its progress, or speak to the crime data, but they did not have a comment at this time.

In a statement to KOMO, Mayor Victoria Woodards said, "We are in the early stages of implementation of the Violent Crime Reduction Plan presented by Chief Avery Moore to the Council on July 12, 2022. The Tacoma Police Department has already begun to implement some of the strategies the Chief had outlined in that presentation and, while this work will take time, we are already starting to see positive changes from week to week. We expect to have a more in-depth presentation on this in Chief Moore's next presentation at noon on November 1, 2022, and I encourage our community to tune in then to learn more."

HEADLINE	08/24 KCSO investigates White Center shooting
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/white-center-homicide-15th-avenue-south/281-e7a8787d-f7d3-40c6-8f7d-029f13daabc8
GIST	<p>WHITE CENTER, Wash. — The King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) is investigating after a man died after being taken to the hospital with a gunshot wound Tuesday night.</p> <p>KCSO deputies responded to a report of shots being heard on the 10000 block of 15th Avenue South in White Center around 8 p.m. Tuesday. Moments later, a man with a gunshot wound was left in the ambulance bay at St. Anne Hospital in Burien.</p> <p>The man was pronounced dead shortly after he was left at the hospital.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the KCSO confirmed the Major Crimes Unit was investigating a homicide in White Center.</p> <p>KING 5 crews saw evidence markers on the ground when they arrived at the scene in White Center around 5:15 a.m. Authorities were outside a home on 15th Avenue South investigating overnight but cleared the scene just before 6 a.m. Wednesday.</p> <p>No other information is available at this time.</p>
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HEADLINE	08/25 Washington DC violent day: 12 shot
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/washington-dc-crime-least-12-people-shot-violent-day-across-city
GIST	<p>At least 12 people were shot in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, as violent crime continues to rock the nation's capital.</p> <p>The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) said the first incident took place after 2:05 a.m. Police responded to a double shooting that killed a man and critically injured a woman on Florida Avenue Northwest D.C.</p> <p>Later that afternoon, police responded to another Northwest shooting scene on O Street shortly after 12:50 p.m. Authorities said the shooting took place near a senior living facility. Two men were killed, and three other men were injured.</p> <p>Authorities said that the O Street shooting was also near an open air drug market, according to WTTG. It is not clear what circumstances led to that shooting or where exactly it took place.</p> <p>"We're trying to be as resourceful as we possibly can to put our officers and our detectives and our specialized units where the crime is," an MPD official said Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, that crime just keeps moving around," the official continued. "We'll be on one block, and we'll displace criminals to another area where they'll be shootings over there."</p> <p>Less than an hour after the O Street shooting, a teen was shot in Northeast D.C. but found conscious and breathing by police. Another stable gunshot victim, an adult male, was found in Southeast D.C. shortly after 6 p.m.</p> <p>Three men were later shot near Quincy Place around 7:30 p.m. Police found two of the injured victims, who were transported to a hospital, while the third arrived at the hospital on their own.</p> <p>Police are currently investigating all of Wednesday's shootings.</p> <p>The three victims are expected to survive, and D.C. police said they have three suspects in custody in connection to the shooting.</p>

	All of the shootings are being investigated by the Metropolitan Police Department.
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HEADLINE	08/25 Big cities crime surge strikes fear
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/university-students-big-cities-surging-crime-afraid-leave-campus
GIST	<p>As violent crime surges in urban areas across the country, many college campuses in these cities are left in the crosshairs and some students say they now avoid going off campus when possible.</p> <p>Across cities such as Chicago, Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington, D.C., violent crime as of May had increased as much as 40% when compared to the same time in 2021.</p> <p>At the University of Chicago, in a city where overall violent crime is up by 36% compared to the same timeframe in 2021, some students simply chose not to go to areas off campus.</p> <p>Sanjay Srivatsan, a student at the University of Chicago, told Fox News Digital that he generally chooses to stay on campus.</p> <p>"I wouldn't go there," Srivatsan says of the Hyde Park neighborhood, which is where the university is located. "It's a pretty dangerous part of the city, and it's generally not advisable to go there. ..."I don't want to take unnecessary risks."</p> <p>He says that, however, the University of Chicago Police Department makes its presence known on campus.</p> <p>"They are, you know, pretty visible around campus, and there has been crime. So, it's unfortunate, but I think the university police, that's the best they can do," Srivatsan said.</p> <p>Overall, violent crime has remained relatively consistent on the University of Chicago campus from 2018-2020, according to data reported by the institution as required by the Clery Act.</p> <p>In 2020, the university reported 12 robberies on campuses, three aggravated assaults and four vehicle thefts.</p> <p>Those numbers dramatically increased off campus and into the surrounding Hyde Park and South Kenwood neighborhoods, with six murders, 17 sexual assaults, 149 robberies and 107 instances of aggravated battery and assault reported in 2021. That's a 22% increase in violent crime reported in 2021 in the surrounding neighborhoods when compared to the average for the five-year period from 2016 through 2020.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the University of Chicago told Fox News Digital that "the University has engaged with community concerns over many years and is taking many of the steps that community residents and elected officials have suggested."</p> <p>"In 2019, the University's Office of Civic Engagement (OCE) formed a Community Development Working Group with more than 50 local stakeholders from business, workforce development, and housing organizations to discuss the University's role as an economic anchor, and explore deeper partnership to spur more equitable development and economic inclusion on the South Side," the spokesperson said in a statement.</p> <p>In Atlanta, where the Georgia Institute of Technology is located, violent crime is 6% higher than it was at the same time in Aug. 2021, according to data from the Atlanta Police Department. In the zone where Georgia Tech is located, violent crime is 5% higher than it was at this point in time last year.</p> <p>Nathaniel Greve, a student at Georgia Tech, told Fox News Digital that although crime rates are on the rise for areas surrounding the campus, the campus police department keeps the community safe.</p>

"I can consistently commend the efforts of our campus police department. They do a really good job to keep us safe," Greve said. "I also think that we fare quite well when we are compared to other schools that are in big cities."

He said that he never has felt unsafe while walking across campus, even being embedded in a major city.

"I mean, within eyesight, at any given location, you can either easily reach an emergency phone or there's a police officer rolling down the street, and they have blue lights on all the time. So, you know who they are or where they are. And I mean, you would never feel bad about going up to one of them and asking for assistance," Greve said.

However, he said that some students are being forced to find housing that is farther and farther from campus because of an increase in demand, which he says puts them in "pretty rough neighborhoods."

Violent crime reported to the Georgia Tech Police Department has increased by 74% when compared to the same time in 2021, with a majority of the increases coming from motor vehicle thefts, which have increased by a total of 337% when compared to last year. There have been 35 motor vehicle thefts in 2022, compared to eight in 2021.

A spokesperson for Georgia Tech told Fox News Digital that it tries to build preparedness within its campus community.

"Protecting our community against crime starts with active engagement. We work hard in our campus community to build awareness around establishing safe routines, connecting with safety resources and growing a network of support. GTPD officers and civilian employees interact frequently with our students, faculty, staff and guests," the spokesperson said. "The more engaging we are around safety topics, the better prepared our community is, and the more likely we are to avoid becoming victims of crime."

The spokesperson also said that it has "thousands of cameras on campus connected to a monitoring and alert system that gives us a very big advantage in preventing or solving crime."

Sgt. Betsy Brantner Smith, a spokesperson for the National Police Association, told Fox News Digital that college campus police departments are different from other police departments from around the country.

"It's going to be extremely diverse. It's going to be somewhat transient. You know, people come from all over and then, you know, they spend, nine months of the year on campus. Part of your population is going to be newly away from home. And that's an issue. Sometimes, you know, a lot of times college kids, especially, you know, freshman, sophomore, they're a little naive about, you know, making their way around by themselves," Smith said. "You're going to have theft issues, sexual assault issues, things like that."

As a parent, Smith said it's extremely important that her children go to colleges where there is a "fully certified police department" because of issues such as mass shootings.

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HEADLINE	08/24 Uvalde school board fires police chief
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/uvalde-school-board-police-chief-pete-arredondos-firing/story?id=88692404
GIST	<p>Uvalde school board officials unanimously voted Wednesday to fire Pete Arredondo, the school district's police chief, exactly three months after the school shooting that killed 19 students and two teachers.</p> <p>The termination is effective immediately.</p> <p>Arredondo was not in attendance at his termination hearing out of concerns over his safety, his attorney, George Hyde, said in a 17-page statement released shortly before the community gathered Wednesday evening.</p>

Hyde claimed that the district did not file proper legal procedures in proceeding with disciplinary action and that follow-up requests for access to district complaints or investigations "have been ignored by the district," calling the proceedings an "illegal and unconstitutional public lynching."

Brett and Nikki Cross, aunt and uncle guardians to 10-year-old Uziyah Garcia who was killed in the May 24 shooting, showed up in bright orange shirts with a picture of Uziyah on them. They sat in the front row before the school board. Many families brought large, printed photos of their children. One community member held a sign that said, "If you did not do your job, give up your badge," and another that said, "We want accountability."

Following the meeting, the audience left unceremoniously, with no cheering or applause. As some community members exited the auditorium they chanted, "We're not done."

District spokeswoman Anne Marie Espinoza said she had no additional information, telling ABC News after the board adjourned, "You heard what I heard."

Arredondo has been the target of criticism for the delayed response to the May 24 tragedy.

School officials have continued to face pressure to hold officers accountable for the 77 minutes it took before law enforcement breached a classroom door and killed the 18-year-old gunman.

The Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District recommended that Arredondo be fired. The Uvalde school board [canceled its July 23 special session](#) to consider the district's recommendation "in conformity with due process requirements, and at the request of his attorney."

School board members agreed in an Aug. 15 meeting to hire outside attorneys ahead of the hearing.

Parents and community members have called on officials to fire Arredondo immediately, with some calling for the firing of other members of Uvalde's school district police force who were present during the shooting.

According to an [investigative report by the Texas House of Representatives](#) into the events of May 24, the school district's written active shooter plan assigned Arredondo "to assume command and control" during an active shooter incident.

"But as events unfolded, he failed to perform or to transfer to another person the role of incident commander," the report from the state House read. "This was an essential duty he had assigned to himself in the plan mentioned above, yet it was not effectively performed by anyone."

The report goes on to describe the general consensus from witnesses that officers on the scene either "assumed that Chief Arredondo was in charge, or that they could not tell that anybody was in charge of a scene described by several witnesses as 'chaos' or a 'cluster.'"

In [an interview with The Texas Tribune](#), Arredondo said he did not consider himself the commanding officer on the scene. He has said he was not made aware of the 911 calls coming from the children in the attacked classrooms.

Arredondo has defended the police response to the incident.

"We responded to the information that we had and had to adjust to whatever we faced," Arredondo said. "Our objective was to save as many lives as we could, and the extraction of the students from the classrooms by all that were involved saved over 500 of our Uvalde students and teachers before we gained access to the shooter and eliminated the threat."

	<p>Fifteen months before the school shooting, Arredondo at a school board meeting mentioned some of the security issues that investigators found played critical roles in the failures connected with the May 24 massacre, including problems with police radios and school doors left open.</p> <p>In other remarks, Arredondo pointed out the need for more active shooter training.</p> <p>Arredondo resigned from his city council post and is currently on leave from his position as UCISD police chief.</p> <p>He is calling for the board to "immediately reinstate him, with all back pay and benefits and close the complaint as unfounded," his attorney said Wednesday.</p>
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